LISTENING TO THE LAND

NATIVE AMERICAN LITERARY RESPONSES TO THE LANDSCAPE

LEE SCHWENINGER

VISIT…

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LEE SCHWENINGER

The University of Georgia Press *Athens & London*

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

12 11 10 09 08 C 5 4 3 2 1
12 11 10 09 08 P 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Schweninger, Lee.
Listening to the land : Native American literary responses to the landscape / Lee Schweninger.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978-0-8203-3058-7 (alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-8203-3058-2 (alk. paper)
ISBN-13: 978-0-8203-3059-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-8203-3059-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. American literature–Indian authors–History and criticism. 2. Human ecology in literature. 3. Indians in literature. 4. Stereotypes (Social psychology) in literature. 5. Environmental ethics. 6. Indian ethics–North America. 7. Indian philosophy–North America. 8. Indians of North America–Ethnic identity. I. Title.
PS153.I52 S38 2008
810.9'36–dc22 2007039050

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data available
ISBN for this digital edition: 978-0-8203-3637-4

For LaVonne Ruoff

friend and mentor

She told wonderful stories, and as I listened, I began to feel more and more sure that her voice proceeded from the land itself. . . .

In Ko-sahn and in her people we have always had the example of a deep, ethical regard for the land. We had better learn from it. Surely that ethic is merely latent in ourselves. It must now be activated, I believe. We Americans must come again to a moral comprehension of the earth and air. We must live according to the principle of a land ethic. The alternative is that we shall not live at all. —N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words*

Emptiness and estrangement are deep wounds, strongly felt in the present time. We have been split from what we could nurture, what could fill us. And we have been wounded by a dominating culture that has feared and hated the natural world, has not listened to the voice of the land, has not believed in the inner worlds of human dreaming and intuition, all things that have guided indigenous people since time stood up in the east and walked this world into existence. —Linda Hogan, *Dwellings*

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Acknowledgments

Although I might not have known it at the time, the original inspiration for this book came as a result of a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar on American Indian Literatures directed by LaVonne Ruoff at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1994. Through the experiences of that seminar and the sharing of ideas about the texts with the fellow participants, I began formulating the ideas that eventually inspired this book. It is thus first to those participants and fellow scholars, especially Simone Pellerin and in memory of Roseanne Hoefel, that I acknowledge my debt.

I would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Office of the Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University of North Carolina Wilmington for providing research-reassigned time during the 2005 fall semester for my working on this book. I also want to express my appreciation for all the help from the reference and interlibrary loan staff in Randall Library at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, especially Sophie Williams and Cleta Mosley, without whose patience and assistance progress would have been next to impossible. I especially want to thank Elizabeth Peterson, at the University of Oregon, for her continued and unflagging help with all the really tough and urgent research questions.

A by-now quite different version of chapter 4, "Talking Back: John Joseph Mathews and *Talking to the Moon*" appeared as "Irony and the 'Balance of Nature on the Ridges' in Mathews's *Talking to the Moon*" in *SAIL: Studies in American Indian Literatures* 9.2 (Summer 1997): 41–56. A different version of chapter 6, "Cultural Identity, Storytelling, Place: Revision and

Return in Louis Owens's *Wolfsong*," appeared as "Landscape and Cultural Identity in Louis Owens's Wolfsong" in *SAIL: Studies in American Indian Literatures* 10.2 (Summer 1998): 94–110. Early versions of many of the ideas developed here found their ways into several different conference papers, and I would like to thank the many, many people who made possible my participation in conferences hosted by the Western Literature Association, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, the Modern Language Association, the American Indian Workshop, the European Association of American Studies, and the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States, all of which provide the forum for the exchange of ideas crucial for such a project.

A work such as this one does not come to fruition without the generous input and feedback of several friends and colleagues in American Indian studies as well as other disciplines. I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude for the ongoing help, advice, and support of several people who sometimes assisted in inexplicable ways without their even knowing it: Chris LaLonde and Robert Nelson for their incisive and invaluable comments on the manuscript itself; Elvira Pulitano, John Purdy, Deborah Madsen, Gerald Vizenor, Joy Porter, and Dan Noland for talking with me about the intersections of literature and the land; Cara Cilano for her encouragement and for her comments on several of the chapters at different stages in their development. Cara has helped me to rethink and reimagine and of course rewrite much of what has found its way into this book.

And finally I want to thank LaVonne Ruoff for her tireless commitment to the study of American Indian literatures, for her generosity and support, for the direction and guidance she has provided over the years. And for her good humor. To her I owe so much more than I can express.

Listening to the Land

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When we examine myths, we find that they are a high form of truth. They are the deepest, innermost cultural stories of our human journeys toward spiritual and psychological growth. An essential part of myth is that it allows for our return to the creation, to a mythic time. It allows us to hear the world new again.

—*Linda Hogan,* Dwellings

Introduction

An Ethical Regard for the Land

In his essay "Native American Attitudes toward the Environment," Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday declares that an American Indian relationship toward the land "proceeds from a racial or cultural experience" ("Native" 80), and in the essay "An American Land Ethic," he recalls finishing writing *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, insisting that in the person of "Ko-sahn and in her people we have always had the example of a deep, ethical regard for the land" (*Man* 105). In the words of the Laguna Pueblo author Paula Gunn Allen: "We are the land . . . that is the fundamental idea embedded in Native American life and culture in the Southwest" ("Iyani" 191). Louis Owens, Choctaw and Cherokee, declares that the ecological perspective is important for him in a way that is typical of many Indian writers. As he explains in the introduction to his work of literary criticism, *Other Destinies*, "Native American writers are offering a way of looking at the world that is new to Western culture. It is a holistic, ecological perspective, one that places essential value upon the totality of existence, making humanity equal to all elements but superior to none and giving humankind crucial responsibility for the care of the world we inhabit" (*Other* 29). In the final chapter of *Mixedblood Messages*, Owens again articulates his idea of a land ethic, one garnered from an understanding of

American Indian relationships with the natural environment: "closeness of vision, reciprocity, and respect are powerful medicines, the only medicines that may, perhaps, save humanity from itself" (*Mixedblood* 236). In her essay "Where I Ought to Be: A Writer's Sense of Place," Ojibwa writer Louise Erdrich contends that the task of Native American authors writing about place is different from European American authors, such as William Faulkner and Willa Cather, because Native American writers "must tell the stories of contemporary survivors. . . . And in all this there is always the land" ("Where" 48). In the preface to a collection of essays, Chickasaw poet, novelist, and essayist Linda Hogan argues that non-Indian American culture has no deep or sincere connection with the earth, and this lacuna has caused Native Americans to lose their own sense of the land: "It has been my lifelong work to seek an understanding of the two views of the world, one as seen by native people and the other as seen by those who are new and young on this continent" (*Dwellings* 11). As these excerpts make clear, several contemporary American Indian authors argue that there does indeed exist an indigenous relationship to, appreciation for, awareness of, or understanding of the land that is significantly different from non-Indian relationships. According to many, this deep and ethical regard for the land is thoroughly ingrained in the culture; it is in the blood.

By examining the literature of several different Native American writers in the context of their attitudes toward the land, this study focuses on questions about the ways in which they profess and articulate their complex and nuanced sense of an ethical relationship with the earth while at the same time often confronting and even refuting imposed stereotypes of American Indians as nature lovers or as children of the wild who worship a Mother Earth goddess. That is, these American Indian writers offer views of their own attitudes toward and relationships with the land as unique, and in their writings they thus simultaneously embrace and deny a land ethic stereotype themselves. The response of Vine Deloria Jr. to T. C. McLuhan's book *Touch the Earth* is revealing in just this context.

The non-Native writer McLuhan actually both imposes and perpetuates the kinds of stereotypes assumed by non-Natives in general by insisting on a special American Indian relationship to the land. In the introduction to *Touch the Earth,* her collection of Edward Curtis photographs and Native American excerpts, McLuhan contributes to the stereotype: "We need to

establish a right relationship with the land and its resources; otherwise, the destruction of the Indian will be followed by the destruction of nature." McLuhan contends that for "many generations [American Indians] learned how to live in America, in a state of balance" (2). To support this assertion, she draws on words attributed to an unnamed Wintu woman: "The White people never cared for land. The Indians never hurt anything, but the White people destroy all" (15). The very troubling conception of the "destruction of the Indian" aside, McLuhan's argument that the Indians knew all along of the necessity to "establish a right relationship" oversimplifies. As Sioux author Vine Deloria Jr. writes, specifically in response to McLuhan's book, the collection is full of "maudlin emotions in an already overemotional book" (V. Deloria, *God Is Red: Native* 31). What Deloria has to say about religions is applicable in the context of such notions of right relations imposed on American Indians: "Indian religions are a hot item. It is the outward symbolic form that is most popular. . . . Tribal religions have been trivialized beyond redemption by people sincerely wishing to learn about them" (*God Is Red: Native* 43). Here then we have an articulation and perpetuation of the stereotype by a non-Indian: American Indians (from the nineteenth or early twentieth century) had a special relationship with nature. And we have a critique of that stereotype by Deloria. In the same book in which Deloria challenges stereotypes presented by well-intentioned compilers such as McLuhan, however, he codifies his own sense of Indians as especially connected with the land: "As long as Indians exist there will be conflict between the tribes and any group that carelessly despoils the land and the life it supports. At the deepest philosophical level our universe must have as a structure, a set of relationships in which all entities participate" (V. Deloria, *God Is Red: Native* 1). With this as an example, then, we can readily see that there is indeed a situation in which a Native American writer feels himself obligated on the one hand to resist and refute generalizations and stereotypes, yet who at the same time, on the other hand, feels obligated to identify what he feels to be a genuine Native American worldview or philosophy concerning the land that differs significantly from a non-Indian or European American worldview.

Even if we take Deloria's lead and establish that a particular individual or particular tribal group practices a discernable land ethic, it is dangerous,

and can be misleading, to generalize that practice to Native Americans of other regions, other Indian nations, or even individuals of the same tribe. Aware of the dangers of overgeneralizing and writing primarily of Northeastern and Plains Indians in the epilogue to *Keepers of the Game* (1978), Calvin Martin argues that although they did not practice a land ethic per se, Native hunters "revered and propitiated" nonhuman nature because they felt that the animals were "inherently deserving of such regard"; Native Americans "appealed to them for spiritual and aesthetic sustenance" (C. Martin 186). In *All That Dwell Therein* (1982), in contrast, Tom Regan maintains that to attribute a "land ethic" to Native Americans is "to show them a false respect" (Regan 235). He argues that Native American relationships with and attitudes toward the land must remain ambiguous. A few years later, with *In Defense of the Land Ethic* (1989), J. Baird Callicott disagrees with Regan, and in an argument similar to Calvin Martin's suggests that there is indeed an identifiable American Indian acknowledgment of responsibility toward nonhuman nature. He states emphatically that "the world view typical of American Indian peoples has included and supported an environmental ethic, while that of Europeans has encouraged human alienation from the natural environment and an exploitative practical relationship with it" (Callicott 177). In his essay playfully but pointedly entitled "Friendly Fire: When Environmentalists Dehumanize American Indians" (1999), David Waller takes issue with Callicott specifically, and, echoing Regan, argues that categorizing Native Americans as environmentalists is "damaging to Indians of the past, present, and future." Such categorization, he argues, trivializes American Indian cultures and tends to " 'disappear' important concerns of contemporary Indians" (Waller 277). Thus the debate continues among non-Indian scholars of American Indian history and culture.

Meanwhile, seemingly ignoring the debate altogether, the editor of the very book that contains Waller's "Friendly Fire" essay introduces the section "Environmental Issues" by noting that "Native American cultural life has traditionally been deeply connected to the environment. Spiritual views and language show great respect for the interconnectedness of humans, plants, animals, and the world" (Champagne 275). In another essay on Native Americans and the environment, David Lewis demonstrates how deeply the land-ethic stereotype has been ingrained in the American

culture in general when he likewise assumes a priori that American Indians developed an elaborate land ethic. He writes, for example, that "land—*place*—remains the essence of Native identity and sovereignty" (D. Lewis 440). But for others the debate is significant and does indeed continue. If attitudes expressed by Lewis, Callicott, and Calvin Martin represent one extreme, the environmental ethic argument, at another extreme are anthropologist Shepard Krech III and paleontologist and geochronologist Paul Martin. Krech's essay collection *Indians, Animals, and the Fur Trade* attempts to refute Calvin Martin's thesis in *Keepers of the Game.* Krech compiles the collection as a challenge to Calvin Martin's argument that "the single most important deterrent to excessive hunting . . . was the fear of spiritual reprisal for indiscreet slaughter" (C. Martin 18). Krech himself argues that Pleistocene hunters may well have played a major role in both megafauna extinction and the near extinction of American bison as well as other species. Paul Martin argues for what he calls an American Indian "prehistoric blitzkrieg" in the context of Pleistocene extinctions (P. Martin, "Prehistoric Overkill: The Global Model" 397). In several different essays, Paul Martin repeats his thesis that prehistoric Americans were anything but environmentally aware, that they are the overkill culprits who slaughtered all megafauna in North America at the end of the Pleistocene: "Extinction closely follows the chronology of prehistoric man's spread and his development as a big-game hunter. . . . The phenomenon of overkill alone explains the global extinction pattern" (P. Martin, "Prehistoric Overkill" 75). The fact is these scholars of American Indian history and culture continue a critical (even philosophical) debate about whether, or to what degree, American Indians were and are environmentalists, conservationists, or worshipers of a Mother Earth goddess. Despite the arguments, but like the arguments themselves, the stereotypes imposed by popular culture and perpetuated to some degree by scholars and also by Native American writers, as I discuss in the first chapter, continue to thrive.

In a challenge to the Mother Earth stereotype, which has become so intimately associated with American Indians, Sam Gill in his book-length study *Mother Earth* argues that the concept of a Mother Earth goddess is not originally indigenous at all. Rather, he argues, American Indians actually borrowed it from European colonists: "the story of Mother Earth is a distinctively American story. Mother Earth, as she has existed in North

America, cannot be adequately understood and appreciated apart from the complex history of the encounter between Native Americans and Americans of European ancestry, nor apart from comprehending that the scholarly enterprise that has sought to describe her has had a hand in bringing her into existence, a hand even in introducing her to Native American peoples" (Gill, *Mother* 6). According to Gill, Native Americans have simply borrowed their concept of Mother Earth from its European origins. To make his argument, he refers to Charles Eastman, even though Eastman himself does not use the phrase Mother Earth. Gill quotes a passage from *The Soul of the Indian*: "From the Sun, as the universal father, proceeds the quickening principle in nature, and in the patient and fruitful womb of our mother, the Earth, are hidden embryos of plants and men" (Eastman 13–14). The culmination of Gill's argument in this context is that it is "in Eastman's appropriation of European American language and imagery and his incorporation of it into story that Mother Earth begins to emerge as a real goddess of major importance to the Indians" (Gill, *Mother* 136). Some scholars have of course challenged Gill's thesis that American Indians borrowed from or had imposed on them by non-Indian ethnographers and anthropologists the concept of a Mother Earth goddess. They base their arguments on what they identify as Gill's sometimes sloppy scholarship, his apparent Eurocentrism, and the idea of colonial appropriation.

Ward Churchill argues that one of the major flaws with Gill's thesis is that Gill "had brought out nothing in his book which precluded an *ongoing* and autonomous Native American conceptualization of Mother Earth, divorced from popular (mis)understandings, exactly as traditionalist Indians presently claim." Also, according to Churchill, "[Mother Earth] is possibly the most central of all Native American spiritual concepts" (Churchill, "Sam" 57, 55). Churchill is skeptical of Gill's scholarship, challenging his identification of the first print occurrence of the term "Mother Earth" as it might relate to some sort of anthropomorphic goddess. Ultimately, asserts Churchill, such colonial enterprises as Gill's offer clear evidence of continued exploitation and co-optation of Native American beliefs and cultural practices. An insidious result of such co-optation is its effect on current and future generations of Native Americans. As Churchill argues, "the living fabric of Indian society is to be destroyed as its youth are 'educated' to view their heritage in exactly the same way as those who seek to subsume

it. This is no rupture with, but rather a continuation and perfection of, the twin systems of colonization and genocide which have afflicted Native America for the past 400 years" (Churchill, "Sam" 66).

In the preface to his 1996 revised edition of *North American Indian Ecology*, J. Donald Hughes makes an allusion (possibly) to Gill's book, wryly declaring that in the years since the publication of his own earlier edition (1983), some non-Indian authors have written " 'Indian' " texts, "while others were writing books to prove that Indians never honored Mother Earth" (Hughes, *North* vii). He makes only this veiled allusion, and in the text proper (barely changed from the 1983 edition) he makes no mention whatsoever of the Mother Earth goddess debate. Indeed it is thus hard to know whether he is challenging Gill's thesis or buying into a stereotype himself, or both. On the very first page of the first chapter, "The Unspoiled Continent," he writes that Native Americans "had learned a secret that Europe had already lost, and which we seem to have lost now in America—the secret of how to live in harmony with Mother Earth" (Hughes, *North* 1). Further along in the book, he devotes an entire chapter to "The Gifts of Mother Earth," writing that through "long experience and deep reverence for Mother Earth and the growing things that they regarded as her children, Indians learned to apply to farming what we would call ecology" (Hughes, *North* 65). Hughes's assumptions are indicative of how widespread and commonplace the stereotype of an American Indian association with Mother Earth has become. Apparently uninterested in issues of origins or current debate, Hughes simply uses the terminology without clarification, definition, or contextualization.

Complicating the rebuttals to Gill's thesis is the argument that, in many cases, ideas of Indianness—as those ideas relate to the environment, as Churchill suggests—have indeed been sold back to Native Americans, and such ideas thereby actually become an integral part of Native identity. As evidenced by the many collections of Mother Earth sayings, the belief or assertion that American Indians revere a Mother Earth goddess is in fact widespread among American Indians themselves, regardless of its origins. Many statements concerning the centrality of Mother Earth find their way into handy, popular publications that promise to offer glimpses into Native American environmental wisdom. As a Winnebago wise saying has it, "Holy Mother Earth, the trees and all nature, are witnesses of your

thoughts and deeds" (McLuhan 5). Chief Joseph (Nez Perce), a contemporary of Smohalla, is reputed to have said that the "earth is the mother of all people" (Running Press 95). Big Thunder (Bedagi) is credited with stating that the "earth is our mother" (Running Press 39). Of the Indians' responsibility to the land, Don Coyhis (Mohican) says, "You will be the keepers of the Mother Earth" (Schaef 21 April). Franklin Kahn (Navajo): "We need to respect Mother Earth and care for the planet" (Schaef 26 April). Phil Lane (Yankton Lakota): "We must respect our Mother, the Earth, or we can never grow as human beings, her children" (Schaef 26 February). Little Star (tribe unidentified): "All affirmed the central role of . . . the bond between Indians and 'Mother Earth' " (Schaef 17 October). Thomas Banyacya (Hopi): "We are children of Mother Earth . . . and were sent to help keep this land in balance" (Schaef 4 August). And much more recently, activist Native Americans such as Russell Means and Dennis Banks comment on the important and very real role of Mother Earth: " 'It is our philosophy that because all living things come from one mother, our Mother Earth . . . we have to treat one another with the same respect and reverence that we would our own blood relatives' " (qtd. in Vizenor, *Crossbloods* 194; Vizenor's ellipsis). In another context, in the foreword to the collection *Defending Mother Earth*, Means worries that if "humanity keeps abusing Mother Earth, she will retaliate, and her abusers will be eliminated. . . . [M]any of our prophecies tell us that" (Means xii). Of course, the many, many references and allusions to Mother Earth subsequent to its currency in the late nineteenth century do not in themselves refute Gill's thesis. He argues that after its introduction, the belief in a Mother Earth goddess became widespread.

Ultimately scholars recognize, of course, that American Indians themselves are subject to the same stereotypes and generalizations about their past and present cultures as are non-Indians. American Indians grow up exposed to or limited to the same television programs, the same movies, and the same books; they thus see themselves repeatedly depicted as environmentalists or as a people having a special spiritual relationship with the earth. Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Sherman Alexie makes and satirizes this point repeatedly. Concerning any special relationship to the earth, for example, Alexie jokes: "White people only like Indians if we're warriors or guardians of the earth. Guardians of the earth! Have any of you ever been

to a reservation? A guest house is a rusted car up on blocks out behind a H.U.D. trailer." In the context of men beating drums in the woods, Alexie becomes sarcastic: "Hey, Indians gave that up a hundred years ago. Now we're sitting on the couch with the remote" (qtd. in Egan 16). At the same time that Alexie contrives to joke about Indians as the antithesis of the environmentally conscious, he implies elsewhere, however, a stark difference between American Indian and European American treatment of and response to the landscape. In his novel *Indian Killer*, he makes the point explicit:

> Scandinavian immigrants who'd settled Ballard had cut down most of the trees upon their arrival. The Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians had missed the monotonously flat landscapes of their own countries, and wanted their new country to remind them of home. Since the first days of their colonization of the Americas, European immigrants had strived to make the New World look exactly like the Old. They either found similar geographical or climatic locations . . . or they plowed, tunneled, clear-cut, and sculpted the land into something ethnically pleasing.
>
> All John knew was that everything in this country had been changed, mutated. (Alexie 73)

Although this is but one example from Alexie's work, it suggests that he too is willing to consider or has on some level accepted the notion that European Americans lack a connection with or an understanding of the environment that the people they displaced hold dear. That American Indians have such a connection is evidenced by Alexie's somewhat romantic implication that the landscape prior to European settlement had not been plowed, tunneled, or clear-cut.

Like Alexie, Gerald Vizenor—in "The Tragic Wisdom of Salamanders," for example—also seems to take issue with the ostensible Indian worship of Mother Earth: "Mother, mother earth, the names honored as tribal visions, could become our nonce words near the sour end of a chemical civilization." That nickname, argues Vizenor, "is the mere mother of manifest manners and tractable consumerism" ("Tragic" 194). Despite his refusal to accept the terminology *Mother Earth goddess*, Vizenor—like Momaday and Hogan as well—does make a point about non-Indians having lost a sense of an inherent connection with the land that he (Vizenor) feels is of critical

importance: "To name the wounded earth our mother, the insinuation of a wanton nurturance, is the avoidance of our own burdens in a nuclear nation" ("Tragic" 195). For an embodiment of this sense of the land, he prefers something more tangible: "The salamander and the natural mediation of amphibians, for instance, could be an unpretentious signature of the earth, the trace between land, water, and our stories" ("Tragic" 194). Vizenor's preference for the salamander is especially appropriate in that amphibians are among the animals most sensitive to environmental disruption. According to Emily Yoffe (a science writer to whom Vizenor refers), "one of the most disturbing things about what's happening to amphibians is that species are disappearing from some of the most remote, pristine places left on the earth" (Yoffe 64). Despite his challenging, postmodern narratives and elusive characters, Vizenor also forcefully argues that "we must learn to hear once more the tragic wisdom of natural reason and survivance" ("Tragic" 208). As is evident from such passages, Vizenor and Alexie, as well as several other American Indian writers, do posit arguments for an American Indian land ethic on some level. At the same time they disallow any simplistic, reductive, or stereotypical readings of American Indian cultures or beliefs. The literary scholar must therefore address questions about how knowledge of the stereotype helps one better read and more fully respond to those Native American authors who do profess an ethical relationship with the earth both in fiction and nonfiction, a profession that is complex and deserving of focused and careful investigation and one that defies reductive analysis.

In the first two chapters I lay the groundwork for the ensuing chapters, which address the works of specific American Indian authors. In chapter 1 I present a discussion of the problematics of a land ethic stereotype, looking at where such a stereotype might originate, how it has seemed to evolve, and how it has been perpetuated. The chapter also sets up a context for the place of ecocritical responses to the literature in question. As it has evolved since the early 1990s, ecocriticism as a field of literary investigation can certainly help readers better or more fully understand and appreciate the American Indian writers I investigate here. The second chapter considers how Winona LaDuke and other (especially but not exclusively Native American) writers challenge the work of historian Shepard Krech, who argues in *The Ecological Indian* that American Indians were neither

environmentalists nor conservationists as the terms are understood today. Krech's book offers an especially interesting example because, as I argue, in setting out to disabuse his readers of the imposition of the ecological stereotype on Native Americans, he runs the risk of appearing to take an anti-Indian stance. I contrast his arguments with those that offer alternative American Indian understandings of environmentalism and conservationism, especially in the context of an understanding of a human being's physical and spiritual relationship with the earth. Such comparisons suggest the intensity of the continuing debate about the extent American Indians do indeed enjoy a special relationship with the land.

In the next chapters I analyze three memoirs (or autobiographies) to suggest how the writers establish differences between American Indian and European American responses to the land. In chapter 3 I make the case that Luther Standing Bear presents an image of Indians as naturists in order to distinguish himself and other Native Americans from European Americans. Demonstrating such a distinction is important to Standing Bear, I suggest, because it enables him to thus establish his own sense of Lakota identity and to offer a worldview perhaps superior to the European American worldview. In chapter 4 I argue that Osage writer John Joseph Mathews's self-acknowledged failure to maintain the balance of nature as he lives on the blackjack ridges in eastern Oklahoma implies and thereby exposes the adverse effects on the environment, the land, and the wildlife of European American settlement. In chapter 5 I look at Louise Erdrich's memoir *The Blue Jay's Dance* to suggest that she uses her birthing memoir to demonstrate how she and her daughters depend on their interaction with and understanding of nature to survive as people of Ojibwa heritage.

In chapter 6, with a discussion of Louis Owens's first novel, *Wolfsong*, the study turns to fiction. I suggest that Owens purposefully juxtaposes an American Indian land ethic with the clearly unethical treatment of the land by European American culture, especially in the context of the logging and mining enterprises that destroy the ecological integrity of the Snohomish homeland. With this juxtaposition Owens challenges his readers to understand how the main character's feelings of responsibility toward his heritage, his personal past, and the landscape are all inextricably interconnected. Owens suggests that, as an American Indian, Tom has the heritage and inclination (and ultimately the wisdom) to take responsibility

for protecting the land. Yet through this depiction, Owens places the responsibility on his readers as well.

Much has been written on *House Made of Dawn* in the context of Abel's relationship with the land, but less about N. Scott Momaday's many essays in which he articulates his understanding of the connections between the land, imagination, and language. Thus, chapter 7 considers Momaday's nonfiction as well as his fiction to suggest how this Kiowa writer articulates what he calls an American land ethic that is specifically American Indian. I am interested in how Momaday sees that land ethic playing itself out in one's very being and sense of identity. Chapter 8 considers the work of Vine Deloria Jr., who—the same year Momaday won the Pulitzer for his first novel—published his then revolutionary *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, a book in which he identifies, challenges, and refutes many of the stereotypes imposed on American Indians. In this chapter, I argue that in several works Deloria refutes stereotypes of American Indians at the same time that he himself recasts American Indians as a people committed to a philosophy in which their sense of the land is paramount. Chapter 9 is devoted to Anishanabeg writer Gerald Vizenor, one of the most prolific literary authors in America. I argue that in a variety of genres Vizenor challenges his readers by presenting elusive trickster figures and post-Indian warriors that deny and defy stereotyping of American Indians as victims or as nature lovers or worshipers of a Mother Earth goddess. Yet, like Deloria, Vizenor at the same time throughout this writing cries out for and describes a land ethic that he implies is specifically Native American.

In chapter 10 I argue that in her novel *Power*, about the endangered Florida panther, Linda Hogan contrasts two worldviews—that of a fictional tribe (the Taiga) and that of European America—in order to ask difficult questions about tribal sovereignty, especially in the context of environmental issues such as the protection of endangered species. She uses the story about hunting a Florida panther to question what it means for an American Indian to intentionally kill an endangered animal and how that ritual hunt differs from killing panthers by disturbing the natural environment, by poisoning, or by enabling deaths on the highways. In chapter 11 the study travels across the continent to the Olympic Peninsula in Washington and the scene of the 1999 Makah hunt of a gray whale. In *Sightings*, Hogan and Brenda Peterson write about the gray whale in general and

that Makah hunt in particular. Again, I am interested in Hogan's juxtapositions of Native American issues, especially treaty rights and sovereignty as opposed, in this case, to issues of animal rights, advocated for the most part, but not exclusively, by European Americans. It is my hope that each of the chapters interrogates arguments about Native American responses to the landscape, responses that are identifiable yet remain complex and varied, nuanced and resistant to trivialization.

The authors and works I examine in the following chapters are by no means meant to offer a comprehensive or exhaustive list of Native American responses to the landscape. Nor are they meant to be representative of Native authors in general. Rather I read each writer as unique, writing in a specific historical moment with her or his own specific concerns. It is through such historical moments, however, that I endeavor to investigate American Indian literary responses throughout the twentieth century. The earliest of the writers, Luther Standing Bear, offers accounts of his late nineteenth-century life on the prairie in contrast to life on the reservation. Writing just before midcentury, John Joseph Mathews is one of the few published Native writers of that era, and so offers a unique historical perspective. The study then turns to some of the most widely known and influential and/or popular voices of the second half of the twentieth century. And finally, Linda Hogan recounts a very late twentieth-century hunt of a gray whale. Despite the popularity of these authors, however, the works I consider and the subject of that consideration have not yet received much attention.

I do make an effort to offer a geographical range by juxtaposing authors from and works set in different parts of the United States. Erdrich's *The Blue Jay's Dance* is set in the Northeast, far across the continent from the action of Vizenor's *Landfill Meditation,* set on the campus at Santa Cruz, California. Hogan's novel *Power* takes place in the Everglades, deep in southern Florida, in stark contrast to the location of the Makah whale hunt in the waters off northwestern Washington and the northwest coast setting of Owens's *Wolfsong*. Standing Bear describes life on the northern prairie, whereas Mathews's *Talking to the Moon* takes place in the southern prairie of eastern Oklahoma. In both *House Made of Dawn* and *The Ancient Child*, Momaday depicts the landscape of the southwest, the region of the country also crucial to many of his essays, such as "Navajo Place Names." The

wide geographical range is not necessarily consistent with the tribal affiliations and biographies of the authors investigated, however. Vizenor (White Earth) and Erdrich (Turtle Mountain) are both Anishinaabe, as is LaDuke, who lives on the White Earth reservation. Both Standing Bear and Deloria are Sioux, but essentially of different centuries. Hogan (Chickasaw) and Owens (Choctaw and Cherokee) both come from southern tribes, though both grew up for the most part away from their tribal homeland and cultures. Mathews (Osage) and Momaday (Kiowa and Cherokee) are both from Oklahoma, and both moved away, in opposite directions, at a young age, in pursuit of their educations.

In addition to presenting a broad historical and geographical range, the subsequent chapters devoted essentially to individual authors offer a range of genres that suggests how the different works speak to and build on one another. Standing Bear's early autobiography anticipates the autobiographies or memoirs by Mathews and Erdrich. The study includes a novel by Owens that, while not an autobiography, does indeed draw on the author's own specific experiences in and around Glacier Peak in western Washington. Hogan wrote *Power* only after she had spent time in Florida, and Momaday writes about Jemez Pueblo near which he grew up. The shorter fiction by Vizenor, as well as his nonfiction essays, and essays by Momaday and Hogan suggest the breadth of genres by these writers. Although the study includes discussion of a few poems in the context of responses to the landscape, poetry is perhaps the genre I most obviously gloss over. This need not have been the case, for many of the writers I consider are accomplished poets as well as fiction writers: Erdrich, Momaday, Vizenor, and Hogan. And there are many other important American Indian poets who could have found a place in such a study. It is thus perhaps the case that American Indian poetic responses to the landscape deserve their own volume. Film is another genre that deserves consideration but finds little space in the present study.

In "Dances with Indians," a review of the film *Dances with Wolves*, Michael Dorris points out that despite all the sympathy such a film garners from its non-Indian audience, it does not "translate into public support for Native American legal action." In fact, it fails to motivate viewers to take any action whatsoever: "the only Indians whose causes and needs this country can embrace, are lodged safely in the past" (Dorris 264). Given Dorris's

response to *Dances with Wolves*, not much had changed between 1990 when the film came out and 1973 when Deloria could write in *God Is Red* that books "about Indians have been notably bereft of the ability to invoke sympathy. Rather they have been dependent on an escapist attitude for their popularity" (*God Is Red* 40). By extension, the implication is that the pop culture's viewing American Indians as keepers of the land is finally simply an escape mechanism, something that does not in itself bring about any actual behavioral change toward the environment. And even when there is hope for action, suggests Deloria, it fails because of the mixed stereotypes of Indians as environmentalists, to be sure, but also because of the apparent temporal distance. Because Native Americans and thus Native issues are locked in a pristine, wild past, "[m]any whites have discerned in the historical Indian response a quality of life distinctly different than what they have come to experience in their own society that makes them return to the Indians of yesteryear instead of confronting the contemporary Indians" (V. Deloria, *God Is Red* 55). The chapters to follow ask the reader to confront the works of (mostly) contemporary American Indian writers as those writers carefully balance a resistance to reductive stereotyping and a firm belief as expressed through their literature that there is such a thing as a meaningful and useful contemporary American Indian land ethic.

> It is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit.
> –*Black Elk,* Black Elk Speaks

CHAPTER ONE

The Land Ethic Stereotype

American Indian Wisdom

Representations of American Indians as environmentalists, as keepers of the land, or as worshipers of a Mother Earth goddess are ubiquitous. These sometimes intricately constructed environmental attitudes attributed to American Indians, moreover, often provide a symbolic, if not a literal, means for both American Indians and non-Indians to articulate an alternative response to the pervasive Western, techno-industrial attitudes toward and treatment of the land. Joseph Backus maintains that "non-Indian Americans are quick to attribute to the traditional Indian what seems an ideal kind of existence." According to this stereotype, writes Backus, "the peoples native to this [Western] hemisphere were able to nurture and preserve in its nearly natural state a greatly varied but thoroughly integrated ecological system for countless thousands of years. . . . Current popularity of this ideal is clearly due to disenchantment with narrow rationalism and the ravaging materialism to which that realism gives license" (Backus 271). In the introduction to *Touch the Earth*, T. C. McLuhan offers an explanation for why non-Indians might seek an environmental consciousness in Native Americans. She suggests that non-Indian Americans can survive only through "a rediscovery of our environment," and that non-Indian Americans "need to establish a right relationship with the land

and its resources. . . . Perhaps now, after hundreds of years of ignoring their wisdom, we may learn from the Indians" (McLuhan 2). The character Lillian Sloan (played by Barbara Hershey) echoes this sentiment in her role as anthropologist in the feature film *The Last of the Dogmen* (1995): "I've spent half my life teaching others," she says. "Now out here with these people, I'm the student" (*Last of the Dogmen*). The editors of *Ecocide of Native America* reiterate this notion of learning from American Indians, noting that with "reference to care of the earth, native societies also have lessons to teach a nomadic Euro-American society. Native notions of sacredness are nearly always intertwined with respect and reverence for the earth" (Grinde 19). Perhaps these writers are making oblique references to words attributed to Rolling Thunder: "When you are ready," he says, "come to me. I will take you into nature. In nature you will learn everything you need to know" (Schaef 14 April).

These perspectives of environmentalism attributed to Native Americans result in large part from representations both imposed on and culled from American Indian cultures by non-Natives. Such perspectives are at work, for example, in the somewhat facile but popular and long-enduring collections of Native American excerpts, works such as T. C. McLuhan's *Touch the Earth: A Self Portrait of Indian Existence* (1971) or the more recent collections such as Joseph Bruchac's *Native Wisdom* (1995) or Anne Schaef's *Native Wisdom for White Minds* (1995). Another, Running Press's *Native American Wisdom* (1993), is a tiny, toylike book that includes photographs by Edward Curtis, as does *Touch the Earth.* Though Curtis took many of his photographs in his studio in the early twentieth century (Curtis completed his multivolume study *The North American Indian* in 1930), he writes that he intended that they represent the subjects as they existed in some pristine, pre-twentieth-century state. The photographs are meant to preserve what Curtis saw as dying cultures. His photographic study, he asserts, is of "a people who are rapidly losing the traces of their aboriginal character and who are destined ultimately to become assimilated with the 'superior race.' " A few pages further on, he writes that "the information that is to be gathered, for the benefit of future generations, respecting the mode of life of one of the great races of mankind, must be collected at once or the opportunity will be lost for all time. It is this need that has inspired the present task" (Curtis 1:xiii, xvi–viii). Along with Curtis's reprinted photo-

graphs in these little books come bits of "wisdom" dealing often with the speaker's response to or interaction with the land. The first entry in *Native American Wisdom*, for example, comes from Luther Standing Bear's *Land of the Spotted Eagle*: "The American Indian is of the soil. . . . He fits into the landscape, for the hand that fashioned the continent also fashioned the man for his surroundings" (Running Press 18; see Standing Bear, *Land* 247). Nor are Native Americans themselves immune from participating in such a book market. The contemporary Native American scholar and Abernaki poet Joseph Bruchac offers one such collection of excerpts with *Native Wisdom*, which fits the paradigm and, according to Bruchac contains "a wisdom" he firmly believes "is greatly needed today—by all human beings" (Bruchac 1). Such mass-marketed books, books sometimes the size of their reader's palm, certainly promulgate stereotypes in that they take the passages out of their contexts, and they do nothing to seriously address, investigate, or question assumptions concerning mainstream notions of Indian interaction with the land.

In addition to such popular books, Hollywood films also render American Indians (until very recently only Indians of previous centuries) as living in some sort of natural paradise, unlike and in stark contrast to their European American contemporaries. Take, for example, the respective cavalry and Indian camps in the blockbuster film *Dances with Wolves* (1990). As we first see it through the eyes of the character Lt. John Dunbar (played by Kevin Costner), the cavalry camp stands on an exposed, barren, lifeless scratch of dirt. Indeed, at this camp even the water is contaminated: a large, drowned wapiti buck rots in a waterhole. In contrast, the Sioux settlement is depicted as idyllic. It sits beside a tree-lined river in a lush green valley, populated by happy young Sioux boys who are somewhat lazily watching over free-grazing Indian ponies. Even if only implied, the contrast is stark and pointed. A similar idyllic viewpoint is implied by the natural, almost mystical garden in *Last of the Dogmen* (1995). This film depicts a group of Cheyenne warriors descended from survivors of the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre in eastern Colorado. The members of this group, who have retained intact the lifestyle of their nineteenth-century ancestors, have been hiding out in the vastness of a pristine garden, secluded in the wilds of the Montana Rockies. These dogmen (and women), over several generations, have spent a century or more virtually untouched by, and completely un-

known to, the European American civilization on the other side of the waterfall tunnel, apparently the only entrance to the garden hideaway. They live in the "old ways," of course, and their edenic lifestyle apparently results in no adverse impact on the land. This is to say nothing of the predictably successful but problematic Disney film *Pocahontas* (1995), a film that exhibits in animation and instills in the minds of millions of children the notion that Native Americans had a completely harmonious relationship with nature. Even the 2002 film *Windtalkers*—about the Navajo code-talkers in the World War II Pacific—insists on a pristine "Indian" landscape. Director John Woo frames his film with idyllic aerial shots of the peaceful but majestic Monument Valley landscape. This landscape stands in stark contrast to the sites of carnage marking the bulk of the film, sites where Japanese and United States soldiers are machine-gunned, torched, decapitated, and blown through the air. The Navajo homeland thus serves as a serene counterpoint to the war-torn Pacific island of Saipan, and that Navajo homeland is the place to which code-talker Ben Yahzee—played by Canadian First Nations (Saulteaux) actor Adam Beach—returns and at which he performs a ceremony of remembrance for a fallen comrade.

The perpetuation of such stereotypes is not limited to popular books or film. Advertisements and bumper sticker slogans also rely on and perpetuate the stereotype. The now infamous 1971 depiction of Iron Eyes Cody, "the crying Indian," shedding a tear over the pollution he sees around him relies on the existing stereotype of the American Indian as especially environmentally conscious as it simultaneously helps to further ingrain that stereotype into the popular mind. In a 2005 *New York Times Magazine* article on Native American identity, "The Newest Indians," Jack Hitt identifies an Indian's car by noting the bumper sticker: " 'The earth does not belong to us. We belong to the earth' " (Hitt 36). Implicit in Hitt's reference to this bumper sticker as an identifier is the assumption that the concept of American Indian as in touch with an environmental ethos remains fundamental to non-Indian conceptions of Indian identity.

As is thus abundantly clear from such compilations of excerpts, from films, and from other popular media, mainstream America continues to stereotype American Indians as symbols of environmentalism, symbols offering a countercultural way to Western postindustrial culture and life. What Ramachandra Guha writes about environmentalism and deep ecol-

ogy as it relates to people in India is applicable here. Guha comments that as seen from Western eyes, "Eastern man exhibits a spiritual dependence with respect to nature—on the one hand, this is symptomatic of his prescientific and backward self, on the other, of his ecological wisdom and deep ecological consciousness. Both views are monolithic, simplistic, and have the characteristic effect . . . of denying agency and reason to the East and making it the privileged orbit of Western thinkers" (Guha 77). As Guha's insight makes clear, stereotyping a group of people as environmentalists is not unique to one hemisphere or another or to one group of people or another. In this sense, it is a colonial imposition. In the specific context of the United States and American Indians, we might ask where such stereotypes come from?

These facts seem indisputable: Columbus misnamed the people he encountered in the New World, the misnomer has survived the more than five centuries since he first applied it, and such a generalized term for the thousands of radically different cultures in the New World is blindingly reductive. Since the late fifteenth century, the Spanish *Indios*, the appellation *Indian*, has been applied indiscriminately to all indigenous peoples of the Americas; lumping all these peoples together assumes and implies uniformity of character and culture despite the fact of thousands of different tribes, languages, and life-styles and tribal customs across—even in only what is now the United States—as geographically diverse an area as any on the planet. The word itself, as Vizenor and many others have pointed out, is reductive and misleading and necessarily forces stereotypes on the people it would denominate. Stereotyping of Native Americans thus begins with the first encounters and the initial reports the explorers sent back to Europe. As Gretchen Bataille writes, the "misrepresentation, commodification, and distortion of indigenous identities have existed from the moment of first contact" (Bataille 1). Along with that single word appellation came other stereotypes that have seriously limited the colonizers' understanding and have haunted the colonized ever since.

In his 1493 letter, Columbus categorizes the Native Americans as other. After describing the physical beauty of the landscape, he describes the people, mentioning their physical stature, their clothing (or lack of it), their intelligence, their observed customs and religion (or absence of it), and their apparent naiveté: according to his report, they "give objects of great

value for trifles, and content themselves with very little or nothing in return. . . . Thus they bartered, like idiots, cotton and gold for fragments of bows, glasses, bottles, and jars" (Columbus 7–8). Through this brief passage from Columbus's description of the people he encountered, one can arguably identify a root cause of the stereotyping that has pervaded European and European American (mis)understandings of Native Americans for the past half millennium. His comment makes manifest the (excusable) ignorance and (inexcusable?) ethnocentrism evident in the admiral's inability (or unwillingness) to question his own value system. As Terry Eagleton explains, "[v]alue is a transitive term: it means whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations, according to particular criteria and in the light of given purposes" (Eagleton 11). The "trifles," material items that the inhabitants of the Caribbean islands were seeing for the first time, were new, exotic, foreign, unique, rare; those items, those baubles, therefore had great value. They were the late fifteenth-century equivalent of nineteenth-century moon rocks.

Columbus had not had the occasion to read Karl Marx, who tells us that the "character of having value, when once impressed upon products, obtains fixity only by reason of their acting and re-acting upon each other as quantities of value. . . . Could commodities themselves speak," continues Karl Marx somewhat playfully, "they would say: Our use-value may be a thing that interests men. It is no part of us as objects" (Marx 779, 783). Columbus (along with the explorers and colonists he has come to symbolize) was unable to appreciate the possibility of relative value systems and so his demeaning assumption that the people had no sense of what was materially valuable became an identifier of the Indian. The stereotype culminates in what is perhaps one of the most popular schoolbook stories about early contact: that the Canarsee Delawares (if that was indeed the tribe) traded what is now Manhattan Island to Peter Minuit and the Dutch for a handful of glass beads. And even if the Canarsees knew the (low) value of the glass beads, the story goes, they had no use for "ownership" of land. How could they own it? They were part of it.

Columbus's initial ethnocentrism (however understandable in context, in its time, place, and general situation) is replicated and perpetuated by explorer after explorer and colonist after colonist, century after century. Although it might have begun with the Spanish, it was perpetuated by the

Dutch, French, and English, among others. According to Robert Berkhofer in *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*, regardless of the nationality of the explorers or colonists or of the American Indian nation being described, the "terminology and descriptions all indicate that the [Europeans] saw Indians according to the twin criteria of Christianity and [European] civilization":

> Whites overwhelmingly measured the Indian as a general category against those beliefs, values, or institutions they most cherished in themselves at the time. For this reason, many commentators on the history of White Indian imagery see Europeans and [European] Americans as using counterimages of themselves to describe Indians and the counterimages of Indians to describe themselves. Such a negative reference group could be used to define White identity or to prove White superiority over the worst fears of their own depravity. (Berkhofer 18, 27)

In other words, Europeans and European Americans saw the indigenous people, analyzed them, (mis)understood them, and described them based on how they saw themselves and in terms of what they valued, both materially and spiritually. Philip Deloria takes this notion one step further when he offers a summary of D. H. Lawrence's responses to American literature: "Savage Indians served Americans as oppositional figures against whom one might imagine a civilized national Self" (P. Deloria 3). In this sense it is not difficult to see how mainstream European Americans have needed to cast Native Americans as environmentally savvy: the more aware of American environmental degradation the late twentieth-century colonizers became and thus the more they valued untrammeled wilderness, the more they needed Indians to be in touch with a "natural" and unblemished environment.

Issues concerning different conceptions of material value are thus not necessarily separate from issues concerning different attitudes toward the land and the environment. In his contribution to the 1999 MLA "Forum on Literature and the Environment," Timothy Sweet, for example, suggests that ecocritics ask questions about "the role of human labor in nature's economy": "How do we understand the engagements with the natural environment by means of which we sustain our lives and produce our cultures?" (*PMLA* 1103). In the context of this study, a look at various

ways of engaging with the environment—like different value systems in general—asks us to rephrase Sweet's question only slightly, to ask how a particular value system has shaped a culture's attitudes toward the environment or landscape as well as toward the people and their place within that environment. This seems especially important when one considers the environment as a "discursive construction," as David Mazel calls it. According to Mazel, "the idea of the natural environment . . . provided those early nation builders a useful stance from which to *mis*understand their activities. It mystified rather than clarified their relationships to both the land and the people they worked to subordinate upon the land" (Mazel xii, xiii). Stereotypes of American Indians are in this sense mirrors reflecting the interests and values of the European colonizers.

Louis Owens addresses the issue of what it means to be called an Indian when he writes that "European America holds a mirror and a mask up to the Native American. . . . The mask is one realized over centuries through Euro-America's construction of the 'Indian' Other. In order to be recognized, and thus to have a voice that is heard by those in control of power, the Native must step into that mask and BE the Indian constructed by white America" (*I Hear the Train* 217). Leah Dilworth makes the same point on a regional scale in her study *Imagining Indians of the Southwest*: "These images were more about their makers than about Native Americans and imagined a primitive that was a locus for idealized versions of history, spirituality, and unalienated labor" (Dilworth 3). Gerald Vizenor discusses the word and the significance of its capitalization: "The *Indian* is a simulation and loan word of dominance; the *indian* is an ironic crease" (*Fugitive Poses* 14). Vizenor writes that, "[u]sed as a noun, Indian is a simulation of racialism, an undesirable separation of race in the political and cultural interests of discovery and colonial settlement of new nations; the noun does not reveal the experiences of diverse native communities" ("Introduction" 1). In response to the stereotyping that results from the single word, Vizenor introduces what he calls "post-Indian warriors," word warriors who do battle against reductive stereotypes. This may well be the context in which to acknowledge that I too perpetuate the use of the word *Indian*, as do many of the writers whose works I investigate. In my sense of the word's usage, the challenge is not necessarily to avoid the word altogether—especially since that does not seem to be consistent with a productive investigation

of the literature—but to be aware of the gloss the use of such a term necessitates. The phrases "American Indian" and "Native American"—as I use them interchangeably here—might thus profitably be understood as useful or necessary fictions. I use them thus fully aware that to do so makes me liable to the exact same charges I levy, that I too in this specific sense offer a reductive reading, and I offer stereotypes at the same time I attempt to point out the problematics of doing so.

Berkhofer is interested in investigating the reasons behind the perpetuation of the stereotypes, especially the use of the word *Indian* to designate all indigenous peoples in the Americas despite increased and evermore nuanced knowledge of Native American peoples and the dissemination of that knowledge throughout the twentieth century: "The basic question to be asked of such overall White Indian imagery and conception is not . . . why its invention in the first place but why its continuance, or perpetuation, for so many succeeding centuries" (Berkhofer 25). In the specific context of the environmental-Indian stereotype, he writes that the Indian—when perceived as good, as the noble savage—was a person who appropriated a "wholesome enjoyment of nature's gifts" (28). Early nineteenth-century novelist James Fennimore Cooper certainly contributed to the creation of the image of a nature-loving and nature-astute noble savage. In the opening paragraph of *The Last of the Mohicans,* for instance, he describes how the land itself was an enemy to the English and French soldiers, but by "emulating the patience and self-denial of the practiced native warriors" the Europeans "learned to overcome every difficulty" (Cooper 11). It is no accident that the European American hero of Cooper's Leather Stocking series, Natty Bumpo, dresses in buckskin and carries the knowledge of the woods and of human nature, characteristics generally ascribed to and consistent with the stereotypical notion of the noble savage.

In the twentieth century, as Philip Deloria points out, Ernest Thompson Seton characterizes the role that he saw the American Indian playing around the turn of the nineteenth century. Seton believed that American Indians were (or had been) in special touch with the natural world and should thus serve as the models for young European American boys who had gotten soft and had lost touch with the natural environment. According to Deloria, "Seton placed exterior Indians outside the temporal (and societal) boundaries of modernity. There, they represented positive qual-

ities—authenticity and natural purity—that might be expropriated, not for critique (as in the case of the traditional noble savage) but as the underpinning for a new, specifically modern American identity" (P. Deloria 103). According to Seton himself, the "Red Man is the apostle of outdoor life, his example and precept are what young America needs today above any other ethical teaching" (quoted in P. Deloria 96). In the introduction to his 1907 work on the North American Indian, Edward Curtis articulates what so many of his photographs demonstrate so graphically: the natural American Indian in nature. The Indian's story, writes Curtis, "is a record of the Indian's relations with and his dependence on the phenomena of the universe—the trees and shrubs, the sun and stars, the lightning and rain,—for these to him are animate creatures" (Curtis 1: xv). Once thus established, the stereotype of American Indians as apostles of the outdoors thrived throughout the twentieth century. That stereotype is perhaps most obviously and poignantly embodied, as mentioned above, by the television commercials and posters presenting the image of the crying Iron Eyes Cody as, from his canoe, he laments the pollution in the once-upon-a-time pristine waters of the New World.

These examples suggest that the stereotype is derived and applied in only one direction, as if coming only from Europeans or European Americans. But as suggested by the many excerpts from indigenous people quoted above, and as this book argues about many published tribal writers, American Indians have themselves shared in creating and perpetuating the stereotype. According to Mary Lawlor, since the 1973 standoff at Wounded Knee, Native Americans "have taken substantial control over the production of images and narratives of tribal pasts and contemporary experience in complex styles of public tribal self-representations." Lawlor focuses on museums, powwows, and casinos as the "venues where this work of tribal self-representation gets done" (Lawlor 2). One could certainly add that the work of tribal self-representation also gets done through recent Native American film and song, for example, as well as through the literature. The recent spate of American Indian films—films written, directed, and/or acted in by American Indians—certainly do offer opportunity for self-representation. The most notable of these films (based on box-office success) are *Windtalkers*, *Thunderheart*, *Smoke Signals*, *Skins*, and *The Business of Fancy Dancing*. (Both *Dances with Wolves* and *Pocahontas* alone,

however, grossed more than twice the gross of these five films combined [see Aleiss 161]). The films are important for their twentieth-century settings and their presentations and representations of complex, multifaceted Indian characters (played by Indians).

Such self-representation is undeniably important, but it too can result in the perpetuation of popular stereotypes. In the context of the environmental Indian, there are several examples of Native American and First Nations popular singer-songwriters, for example, who represent themselves as a people who have a special relationship with the land. In the song "Colours," Murray Porter characterizes the Indian-land-ethic contention:

> Ten thousand years we lived our lives
> In harmony with Mother Earth
> Taking only what we need to survive
> Not using Her for all She's worth. (M. Porter)

Similarly, in his song "What Is Going to Happen to the Indian," Lawrence Martin calls Indians "keepers of the earth" (L. Martin). ElizaBeth Hill sings that "the Waters are dying and the Great Trees are crying," implying through her song that the people who would take care of them have been put on reservations (Hill). Certainly the poet Joy Harjo with her band Poetic Justice emphasizes the importance of a connection with the land; her house, after all, is "the red earth. It could be the center of the world" (Harjo). Another popular-culture phenomenon that contributes to the stereotype is the self-representation evident in New Age American Indian spirituality. In a kind of self-help book, *Mother Earth Spirituality* (1990), Ed McGaa (Oglala Sioux), for example, describes seven Earth Mother ceremonies that, he admits, have evolved since white interruption. He offers them "to bridge across to the sacred in the natural world" (McGaa 41).

Regardless of historical and cultural explanations for and problematics of the concept of indigenous environmentalism, it is clear that coffee-table books, film, and popular culture in general provide mainstream Americans with a romantic ideal, casting mostly pre-twentieth-century American Indians as models of ethical land stewards that may be perceived as sorely lacking in their own urban, mechanistic lives. But just how widespread is this phenomenon beyond popular culture? In the opening paragraph of a 1998 essay on Linda Hogan and Leslie Marmon Silko in the schol-

arly literary journal *Critique*, Jennifer Brice points to what she calls "a fundamental difference between the fiction of white Americans and that of native Americans. Simply stated, whites are taught . . . to see the land as separate from themselves, whereas Native Americans believe the land is the same as themselves" (Brice 127). Not only does the statement generalize the differences between two groups of people, but it also claims that the attitudes of whites are learned (from the Christian bible, for example) whereas "natives" simply "believe," without intermediary. Toward the end of her essay, Brice writes that to "Native Americans, night and day are just two sides of the same multi-faceted being, characteristic of human nature as well as mother nature." And in the next paragraph: Hogan and Silko are seen to "create their worlds from a context of beliefs and experiences shared by a majority of Native Americans" (Brice 138). As valuable as Brice's essay is as a reading of Silko and Hogan, it nevertheless accepts and perpetuates the Indian-as-environmentalist stereotype even though—or perhaps especially because—environmentalism is not at the center of the essay.

In his introduction to a special issue of the *Environmental Review* in 1985, Richard White acknowledges that "Native Americans and the environment have become so thoroughly linked in popular American culture that it is futile to introduce a scholarly discussion as if it could be conducted in isolation from popular ideas" (White, "Introduction" 101). And furthermore, he argues, one of the major problems of this popular linkage is unfortunately that Native Americans are at once delimited to either noble savages whose environmental ethos will save the world or ignoble savages who actually have no respect for the land and environment whatsoever. White sums up the dilemma in this way: "On either side of the controversy Native American attitudes and behavior become significant only in the reflected light of modern environmentalism; their beliefs are valid only in so far as they conform to modern attitudes. Native American concerns are thus trivialized and stripped of real meaning" (White, "Introduction" 102). From the latter perspective, according to Paul S. Martin among others, Native Americans are presumed to have driven the megafauna to extinction, to have driven buffalo over cliffs and left them to rot, and to have invited nuclear and other toxic waste dumps on their reservations.

In an essay published five years after White's, Annie Booth and Harvey

Jacobs also set out to correct some of the misperceptions that result from the popularization of Native Americans as environmentalists: "In this article we attempt to redress this situation [of 'surprisingly little understanding of Native Americans' actual relationships with their environment'] by offering a synthetic, detailed discussion of Native American beliefs and relations with the natural world as presented by Native Americans and by anthropologists and historians" (Booth 30). Unfortunately, despite their intentions, these scholars themselves tend to accept stereotypes that ultimately have little support, differentiation, or nuance. The authors generalize, for example, that "Native Americans were, and are, life-affirming; they respected and took pleasure in the life to be found around them, in all its diversity, inconsistency, or inconvenience" (Booth 31). This assertion is problematic in that, besides being an oversimplification, the authors leave it unsubstantiated through example or particular.

Another instance of the continuing tendency to dress Native Americans in an environmental cloak, as it were, is evident in the following passage from J. Donald Hughes's book *American Indian Ecology* (1983): "An Indian took pride not in making a mark on the land, but in leaving as few marks as possible: in walking through the forest without breaking branches, in building a fire that made as little smoke as possible, in killing one deer without disturbing the others" (Hughes, *American* 4). Although the book was reissued in a second edition in 1996 as *North American Indian Ecology*, the passage quoted above remains identical. As suggested by the second edition of Hughes's book, the trend of popularizing Native Americans as environmentalists has not necessarily subsided. As Ward Churchill posits, the "exploitation and appropriation of Native American spiritual tradition is nothing new. . . . And it has been functioning in increasingly concerted fashion, under rationales ranging from the crassly commercial to the 'purely academic,' ever since" (Churchill, *Struggle* 99). Grinde and Johansen write that the "philosophical foundation of most Native American societies is fundamentally different from that of Western, 'scientific' humankind. . . . the native view assumes that the forces of the natural world are affected by spiritual forces" (Grinde 13). According to the editors of *Selling the Indian* (2001), a study of the commercialization and appropriation of American Indian culture, "the stereotype of American Indians as the original environmentalists, respecting and living in harmony with

nature, has surged," as has the notion of American Indians as being "spiritually in tune with all of life" (Meyer xiii). As the editors, I think correctly, point out, "there are important connections between commercialism, appropriation, and the formation of modern American identity" (Meyer xii). These promising comments come in the introduction to a collection of essays, yet none of the actual chapters, none of the individual essays, is itself devoted to issues of how non-Indians use Native American ideas of the landscape or of environmentalism (whether or not imposed from outside). Though not further addressed in the collection *Selling the Indian*, Native American relations to the land (past and present) can indeed be seen to have been interpreted, appropriated, codified, and sold. In these many ways, then, mainstream academic culture as well as popular culture has assumed, whether legitimately or not, that American Indians have a special and in many instances enviable relationship with and understanding of the landscape.

Coincident with the ubiquitous popularization of such ideas of Native American attitudes toward the land, and perhaps building on a literary tradition begun by Black Elk, Charles Eastman, and Luther Standing Bear, many serious, contemporary Native American writers assert that as American Indians they do indeed maintain a special relationship with the earth, and literary critics have begun to recognize as much. As Joni Adamson points out, it "has become almost a truism in Native American Studies to observe that contemporary American Indian writers examine the relationship between humans and the land" (*American* xvi). Despite this apparent truism, however, in the first decade since the publication of the initial issue of *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature and Environment* (Spring 1993) only two essays contained any extended discussion of American Indian literature (one each on Silko and Hogan), but neither was devoted exclusively to that author. Such essays fare little better in *SAIL: Studies in American Indian Literatures*. In the same ten-year period, for example, one finds perhaps five essays whose central topics, based on their titles, focus on American Indian literary responses to the landscape. Bucking that trend, the *European Review of Native American Studies* devotes its first issue of 2006 to a special issue on the topic "Place and American Indian Literature and Culture." Guest editor Joy Porter introduces the issue by writing that "[p]lace has always been recognized as being at the heart of Native

American life and literature" (J. Porter 1). There are, to be sure, a few book-length studies that address the subject. One finds such texts as Robert Nelson's *Place and Vision: The Function of Landscape in Native American Fiction* (1993) and Joni Adamson's *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism* (2001) superb models of such endeavors. Also appropriate is Donelle Dreese's study, *Ecocriticism: Creating Self and Place in Environmental and American Indian Literatures* (2002), though American Indian literature is definitely secondary in her study.

Although Scott Slovic, cofounder and coeditor of *ISLE*, maintains that "not a single literary work anywhere utterly defies ecocritical interpretation" (*PMLA* 1102), it is nevertheless the case that most ecocriticism does indeed focus on writings whose overt subject is the human relationship with nature or the environment. This being the case, the responses noted above make especially clear that Native American literature does indeed deserve and to some extent have a place in what has come to be called ecocriticism. In the years since the founding of ASLE (the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) in 1992, ecocriticism, study of literature and the environment, has without a doubt come into its own as a viable field of literary study, and ecocriticism of Native American literary texts has to some extent found a place and outlet as well. Even so, as Cheryll Glotfelty points out in the introduction to her 1996 reader, ecocritism is and remains primarily a "white endeavor," whose practitioners remain interested primarily in European American nature writers (Glotfelty xxv). Since she wrote this introduction, the canon has certainly expanded, but a look at the focus of recent overviews of the history of ecocriticism demonstrates that as regards American Indian literatures, not much actually changes in the next ten years.

In 1999 the editors of *PMLA* (*Publications of the Modern Language Association*) invited its members to comment "on the growing importance and expanding scope of the fields of environmental literature and ecological literary criticism" (*PMLA* 1089). In the context of Native American literature, the responses that constitute this forum demonstrate an interesting absence despite a stated presence. In her call to incorporate the texts of African Americans into the ecocritical fold, for example, Elizabeth Dodd writes that "Native American literature, both contemporary and traditional, does receive enthusiastic attention" (1094), by which she might

mean such glosses as those offered by several of her cocontributors. Jean Arnold, for example, asks readers to imagine a different critical landscape, for both scholarship and teaching: "Far from being American, ecocriticism encompasses the very earth it studies. . . . Imagine courses that cover Native American, Asian, African, Hispanic, or other traditions and draw on their literatures depicting views of nature" (1090). Arnold names no specific texts or authors, however. In the same forum, William Slaymaker argues that ecological literary criticism has left its "watermark on the literatures and criticism of marginalized groups such as Native Americans and Australo-Aborigines" (1100), again without listing specifics. Louise Westling maintains that an "ecological humanism would reorient the evaluation of literature," and she names several of Shakespeare's plays, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and continues the list in abbreviated form: "Native American and African American fiction and poetry; and works from many other cultural traditions" (1104). Although these several contributors mention American Indian literature and thereby insist on its presence, as none names a specific writer or a specific text, American Indian literature itself remains absent in reviews of ecological writing. As undeniable as these assertions of inclusion are, they are only the very first step in acknowledging that the texts of Native American writers deserve a place in the ecocritical canon.

Five years after the publication of the *PMLA* forum, in 2004, in his overview of the field of ecocriticism, Michael Cohen notes that the biennial ASLE conferences have allowed for sessions on Native American literature, but in the course of his essay he mentions none of the sessions' subjects (though he does identify Ofelia Zepeda and Simon Ortiz as plenary speakers at one ASLE meeting). In another overview, "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism" ("The Changing Profession" column in *PMLA*, 2006), Ursula Heise too mentions Native American literature only in passing: "Greater attention to women's and Native American literature shifted the emphasis to more communal engagements with a natural world conceived as always intertwined with human existence" (Heise 508). In a footnote to this passage, she laments that lack of space prohibits her from writing further about ecofeminism. In that note she does not mention American Indian literature. A few sentences further along in the text, however, she does point out that Native American texts proved easily assimi-

lable because Native "authors had long been active in the environmental movement" (Heise 508). Despite the important and very helpful insights Heise has to offer into the history and place of ecocriticism in general, she seems to accept and thereby reinforce an Indian-as-environmentalist stereotype without actually suggesting or elaborating on how an ecocritical approach might offer new or more fruitful ways of understanding American Indian texts and contexts.

Despite the noticeable lack of attention to any specific Native American writers or texts, these responses to the state of the field of ecocriticism are nonetheless valuable in the context of indigenous literatures. For openers, they offer a definition, or a few competing but not mutually exclusive definitions, of ecocriticism, and further, they do imply ways in which an ecocritical point of view might help readers understand and situate Native American texts. Let me start with Cheryl Glotfelty's much quoted definition of the field from her introduction to the *Ecocriticism Reader*: ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). Simple enough. One thinks immediately of Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* or Silko's *Ceremony*, both intimately involved with the physical landscape. Lawrence Buell adds that ecocritical study should be carried out "in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (Buell, *Environmental* 230). Not all have been convinced by or have even agreed with Buell, however. Dana Phillips questions him specifically on this point (Phillips 584), for example, and in his next book on the subject, *Writing for an Endangered World*, Buell essentially retracts that notion, suggesting that Glotfelty's definition might be more satisfactory after all (*Writing* 267). Ursula Heise refines earlier definitions, asking that ecocritics be more aware of genre and of historical contexts. She submits that ecocriticism "analyzes the ways in which literature represents the human relation to nature at particular moments of history, what values are assigned to nature and why, and how perceptions of the natural shape literary tropes and genres" (*PMLA* 1097). These few definitions, from among many, suggest some of the parameters of ecocriticism in general as the study has emerged and evolved. Heise's definition is especially important in the context of Native American literature in that its scope includes the opportunity to historicize as well as question differing value systems in relation to writing about the landscape.

Further elaborating the importance of differing value systems, Ursula Heise maintains that "[e]cocriticism examines . . . how concepts of the natural are constructed in different cultures and expressed through a variety of literary practices" (*PMLA* 1097). Again, by implication, one readily sees how such an attitude toward ecocriticism could lead to a fuller, richer understanding of American Indian literature. Similarly, recent responses include calls for the expansion of the canon beyond nature writers and beyond mainstream American literature. Lawrence Buell, for example, writes that ecocriticism "takes its energy . . . from a pluriform commitment to the urgency of rehabilitating that which has been effectively marginalized by mainstream societal assumptions (*PMLA* 1091), and Scott Slovic argues that there is "no single dominant worldview guiding ecocritical practice" (*PMLA* 1102). Such calls for open-minded practitioners of an open practice certainly invite ecocritical evaluation of nonmainstream literatures from around the world, including indigenous American literatures.

One final point should be made in the context of the evolution of the concept of ecocritical responses to literature and that is the overtly and acknowledged political aspect of ecocriticism. Buell hints at it, of course, when he calls for practitioners who have an environmental agenda themselves. Jonathan Levin offers a fuller political reading when he writes that the "choice is not between culture and nature . . . but rather among different styles of dwelling in the world." According to Levin, ecocritics have already "begun to reveal how cultures have historically rendered nature meaningful and with what particular consequences" (*PMLA* 1098). Writing a decade before Levin and the other contributors to the *PMLA* Forum, Ramachandra Guha calls attention to the very limited and limiting political focus of American or Western deep ecology. Because of the phenomenal economic and land-based wealth and sparse population of North America, specifically of the United States, Americans can worry about saving the "wilderness." For other cultures—his example is India—that is not necessarily an option:

> First, for the sections of society most critically affected by environmental degradation—poor and landless peasants, women, and tribals—it is a question of sheer survival, not of enhancing the quality of life. Second, and as a

> consequence, the environmental solutions they articulate deeply involve questions of equity as well as economic and political redistribution. (Guha 81)

As a result of recognizing challenges such as Guha's, ecocritics have begun to be willing to theorize their field, especially in the context of postcolonial discourse. In the essays in *The Environmental Justice Reader*, Joni Adamson and others are careful to define the environment broadly, as "the places in which we live, work, play, and worship. Environmental justice initiatives specifically attempt to redress the disproportionate incidence of environmental contamination in communities of the poor and/or communities of color . . . and to afford equal access to natural resources that sustain life and culture" (Adamson, *Environmental* 4). Crucial here is the acknowledgement that places where people work and live constitute environment. Adamson's contention is shared by others who have allowed for the urbanization, as it were, of ecocriticism. Graham Huggan can in a sense be seen to sum up an aspect of the overtly political importance of critical evaluation of writings about the environment when he maintains that "ecological disruption is coextensive with damage to the social fabric; and . . . environmental issues cannot be separated from questions of social justice and human rights" (Huggan 704). The landscape is, thus, to use Buell's terms, both the " 'natural' and 'human-built' dimensions of the palpable world" (Buell, *Writing* 3).

As we have seen, the formulation of American Indians as environmentalists has in part been imposed from the outside and perpetuated by popular culture, by scholars from many different fields, by non-Native ethnographers, anthropologists, historians, literary scholars, and even the advertisement people on Madison Avenue in the case of Iron Eyes Cody and countless consumer products using (often denigrating) depictions of "natural Indians" to make a sale. As we have also already glimpsed, however, there is ample historical and literary evidence to suggest that individual members of many tribes across North America do (and did) perceive their relationship with the land differently (and as more environmentally sound) from the European settlers and their descendents. Such renowned spokespersons as Black Elk, Smohalla, and Luther Standing Bear, for example, seem to characterize themselves specifically (and Indians in general) as having a special connection to the plants and animals of the earth.

That is, they maintain that they do indeed view—and thus behave toward—the land differently than do their European American contemporaries. Smohalla is credited with having said in the 1870s that "the earth was the mother of mankind" (quoted in Gill *Mother* 54). Through John Neihardt's account of Black Elk, the Sioux elder has become famous for articulating the need for humans to share the earth with "the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother" (*Black Elk Speaks* 1). And according to Luther Standing Bear, to take another example, the "Lakota was a true naturist—a lover of Nature. He loved the earth and all things of the earth, the attachment growing with age. The old people came literally to love the soil and they sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power. It was good for the skin to touch the earth and the old people liked to remove their moccasins and walk with bare feet on the sacred earth" (Standing Bear, *Land* 192). In *Struggle for the Land*, Ward Churchill sums up (and perpetuates) such perspectives, popular from the nineteenth-century onward: "Unlike Europeans, Native Americans long ago attained a profound intellectual apprehension that human progress must be measured as an integral aspect of the natural order rather than as something apart from and superior to it" (Churchill, *Struggle* 16). Despite observations such as Churchill's, however, some scholars have found space to argue that American Indians have not been such good environmentalists or conservationists at all. The next chapter looks at one such scholar, investigating his argument and contrasting it with arguments, such as Winona LaDuke's, that challenge the former.

Buffalo peoples dream of their buffalo, their older brothers.
They dream of them, and through those dreams, ceremony, and hard work, they are bringing back those herds, bringing back the buffalo.
– *Winona LaDuke,* All Our Relations

CHAPTER TWO

Where the Buffalo Roam

Iconoclasts and Romantics

In the concluding essay of his collection *Mixedblood Messages*, "'Everywhere There Was Life,'" Louis Owens addresses the romantic stereotype of the ecological Indian: "It has long been fashionable . . . to speak and write of American Indians as something like genetically predetermined environmentalists. . . . In the past few years, however, a group of brave and daring revisionist cultural historians have sought to show this environmentalist image for what they think it is: historically and culturally inaccurate romanticism" (*Mixedblood* 220). One of the iconoclasts is Shepard Krech III, a historian who challenges the notion of American Indians as ecologists or conservationists in his 1999 book *The Ecological Indian.* That same year, Winona LaDuke published her account *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life.* LaDuke begins with this overarching statement:

The last 150 years have seen a great holocaust. There have been more species lost in the past 150 years than since the Ice Age. During the same time, Indigenous peoples have been disappearing from the face of the earth. Over 2,000 nations of Indigenous peoples have gone extinct in the western hemisphere, and one nation disappears from the Amazon rainforest every year.

> There is a direct relationship between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biodiversity. (LaDuke 1)

Clearly, LaDuke attributes the losses of cultural diversity and biodiversity to European colonization. In *The Ecological Indian* (1999) Krech devotes his three hundred or so pages to arguing that in previous centuries American Indians contributed their fair share to these extinctions, and he makes his assertions with what many find to be undue forcefulness: "Not fully understanding the long-term systemic consequences of their actions, or unable or unwilling to take corrective action in time to forestall environmental degradation, [American Indians] moved where resources were more promising, or disappeared" (*Ecological* 212). These are two of the extremes from which scholars interested in the environmental Indian contend: Krech the iconoclast and LaDuke perhaps more of a romantic in this context.

Krech presents the argument that neither pre- nor postcontact Native Americans were ecologists or conservationists but have been mislabeled as such. To develop and support his argument, he refers to "specific cases that have been hotly debated" (*Ecological* 27), such as Pleistocene extinctions of megafauna, the disappearance of the Hohokam people, the use of fire, and the near extinctions of deer, beaver, and buffalo. Underlying his desire to challenge what he calls the myth of Native Americans as ecologists and conservationists is his contention that a concept of the "ecological Indian distorts culture. It masks cultural diversity. It occludes its actual connection to the behavior it purports to explain. Moreover, because it has entered the realm of common sense and as received wisdom is perceived as a fundamental truth, it serves to deflect any desire to fathom or confront the evidence for relationships between Indians and the environment" (*Ecological* 27). In the sense Krech outlines in this passage, the impetus behind his study is clearly valuable, and the study's premise is certainly worthwhile as an important corrective to the Romantic Indian-as-environmentalist stereotype imposed on Native Americans.

Despite the promise of Krech's premise as articulated here, however, the book has received very mixed reviews and has even caused some significant contention. Acknowledging what can be seen—and indeed what has been seen—as an attack on American Indian people and culture, in fact, Dan Flores in his supportive review of *The Ecological Indian* notes that the

book has been called "pure propaganda," and he concedes that it has been seen (unfairly he insists) as "a conservative attack on Indian sovereignty" (qtd. in Flores, Review 177, 178). Flores himself maintains that Krech has assembled and synthesized well his effort "to figure out the past. . . . But in this instance modern scholarship is on a collision course with the pop culture understanding of history, which has been internalized by contemporary American Indians rediscovering their cultural traditions" (Flores, Review 178). By equating opposing viewpoints with pop culture, Flores categorically condemns any point of view other than his own as irrelevant because unscholarly, but he also makes himself vulnerable to the very point he dismisses. His review itself reads as a conservative attack on American Indian culture. Richard White argues that *The Ecological Indian* is "certainly not an anti-Indian book, but [Krech's] conclusion implies that Indians—at least those who do not share our ecological views—are not only irrational but also cruel" (White, "Dead" 49). Chad Galts points out that, despite the disclaimers, Krech's book is not "the last word" on the subject, even though his arguments "can sound dangerously definitive" (Galts 2). In another review of the book, Vine Deloria Jr. responds that Krech's argument is "nonsense. . . . The Indians did not make any appreciable dent in buffalo numbers in the Northern Plains. It's anti-Indian stuff" (qtd. in TallBear 2). Perhaps the most potentially damning response is Mindy Pennybacker's contention that Krech's subtext is "insidious: It seeks to absolve Europeans of blame and ultimately can be used to help fuel a backlash of anti-Native sentiment in this country" (Pennybacker 3). According to Pennybacker, scholars "like Krech and Flores [on whose work Krech often relies] may be sincere in challenging the romantic image of Native Americans as the 'first environmentalists'—so it is unfortunate that their theories so neatly suit the purposes of the 'wise use' movement, in which advocates of white entitlement are contesting indigenous peoples' sovereignty, especially with regard to control of their own resources and lands" (Pennybacker 3). In a review in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jeff Sharlet challenges Krech's contention that "ecological Indians did not exist in the past, [but that] the myth itself may have called them into being" (Sharlet 6). In this sense, Krech is seen as making much the same move as Sam Gill when that historian argues that the concept of Mother Earth cannot be attributed to indigenous people but must be considered a European

import that different peoples then adopted in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, adopted because of a sense of crisis and then called their own.

In an essay titled "Not the Call of the Wild," David Brande points out that writers such as Shepard Krech (as well as Sam Gill) attempt, as he puts it, "to debunk romanticized notions about Native religious environmental practices," and he identifies "a certain bad faith on the part of [such] iconoclasts" (Brande 209, 210). This "bad faith" results in part from the divide between Western and Native American conceptions of the natural world. As Brande contends, "alongside Owens's critique of the idea of wilderness is a discussion of the epistemological and political status of Native representations of indigenous attitudes toward the land." Brande argues that Louis Owens "stages a kind of Native 'standpoint epistemology' of the environment, based on long-term tenure in particular ecosystems, that both undercuts the dominant-culture ideas of 'wilderness' and counters recent skeptical attacks on any claims on behalf of specifically tribal orientations to the land" (Brande 196). Owens thus asks for "the recognition that these cultures are, in fact, different from modern industrial culture precisely in the degree of indispensable knowledge they have about local ecosystems" (Brande 211). In contrast to the worldview Owens posits, argues Brande, Krech maintains that Native Americans' "actions, while perfectly reasonable in light of their beliefs and larger goals, were not necessarily rational according to the premises of Western ecological conservation" (Brande 212). Ultimately, Brande reminds us, novelist and critic Louis Owens points out that a Western conception defines wilderness as a landscape untouched by humans. From a Native American perspective, there is no such thing as a wilderness; humans do interact with and change the land they live on, however wild it may appear to European American eyes. The Western concept epitomizes a duality that ignores pre-Columbian peoples' interactions with the landscape, and such a concept thereby writes Native Americans out of history. An insistence on such a duality (land is conceived of as either settled or as a pristine wilderness and thus necessarily untouched by humans altogether) goes right to the heart of what some have seen as a flaw in Krech's approach.

In that it depends primarily on twentieth-century models and thus is one that does not necessarily apply to pre-twentieth-century conditions,

much less precontact peoples in North America, the Western premise and definition of ecology and conservation is problematic in ways similar to the concept of wilderness. Krech defines "ecological" Indians as those who "have understood and thought about the environment and its interrelating components in systemic ways (even if the system, all increasingly agree, is more metaphor than hard and bounded reality). When we speak of them as environmentalists, we presumably mean showing concern for the state of the environment and perhaps acting on that concern" (*Ecological* 24). This is not merely a semantic issue. Krech uses the terms "ecological" and "conservationist" in the context of pre-twentieth-century American Indian interactions with the landscape even though such terms (and therefore concepts?) did not exist. Using the example of fire, Krech argues that Native American burning practices for agriculture and hunting were not ecologically sound: "this does not mean that Indians were not ecologically or systemically aware, only that they did not always think of the ecological consequences of all the fires they lit" (*Ecological* 111). Andrew Isenberg points out that given the way "Krech has phrased the question [Were Indians environmentalists?], the answer can only be negative" (Isenberg, Review 526). In *Ecological Literary Criticism*, Karl Kroeber, like Krech, theorizes that American Indians could not have had an ecological understanding of the environment: Native Americans did not have nor could they have had "a systemically ecological understanding of nature—as . . . the abandoned cliff dwellings in the Southwest poignantly testify" (Kroeber 27). Winona LaDuke, in contrast, challenges such attitudes when she refers to the Braveheart Society to make a point about Indians as ecologists when it comes to buffalo hunting: " 'In traditional buffalo society,' [says Faith Spotted Eagle], 'the the primary role that women had was dividing up the buffalo that were killed. There were some women who were buffalo callers,' Faith explains. 'The third role was to be the ultimate environmentalist, to be able to use everything in the buffalo. Finally, there was the role of mentoring younger women to realize the primacy of our relationship with buffalo' " (LaDuke 162). Whom do we believe? Do we believe that these women used every bit of every bison? Or that Indian hunters were careless and wanton senseless slaughterers? There must be a middle ground.

In the course of Krech's presentation of "specific cases that have been hotly debated" (*Ecological* 27), as mentioned above, reviewers have found

much to object to. Krech argues, for example, that although Native Americans had a tendency to mismanage their resources, their populations were often too small for the people to do too much damage. There is of course ongoing debate about population numbers in the Americas prior to late fifteenth-century European contact, and with the numbers debate comes further debate about the significance of low estimates. Some argue that low-population estimates tend to assuage the feelings of European American guilt over the colonists' genocidal practices, whether intentional or inadvertent. Krech subscribes to the low-population arguments, presenting population data and citing disease to argue for lower populations: "These data from three widely separated regions of North America undermine the assumption behind [Henry] Dobyn's estimate that eighteen million people inhabited North America on the eve of European arrival" (*Ecological* 92). His low-population estimates allow him to argue that if "the human population was relatively low in most parts of the continent, then its relatively modest demands could be met without severe degradation in the environment. If in some places the population rose with demands that could not be met, then ultimately people vanished. . . . this was the most likely scenario for the Cahokians, Anasazi, and Hohokam" (*Ecological* 78). And thus Krech can conclude that the "native people who molded North America were fully capable of transformative action in ecosystems they knew intimately, but in almost all instances their populations were too small to have made much of a difference" (*Ecological* 99). One anticipates the obvious potential inherent contradiction in Krech's argument. On the one hand the populations were too small for the people to do much environmental damage. On the other hand, he argues later in the book, those few Native Americans drove buffalo, deer, and beaver to near extinction.

Krech maintains that the few Native American survivors left on the continent often did not understand the detrimental impact of their hunting or farming practices. He devotes a chapter to the Hohokam people, for example, arguing that through their irrigation practices they brought saline waters onto the cropland and thereby destroyed its fertility: "the Hohokam, uncomprehending the nature of their ecosystem, failed to understand the systemic consequences of their actions" (*Ecological* 46). Krech discounts other arguments that might explain their disappearance, including earthquake, flooding, and disease introduced by Europeans. As to Emil Haury's

thesis in *The Hohokam* (1976) that the Hohokam people were environmental exemplars, Krech writes that as "historically contingent as others put under the lens here, it reveals far more about the time when it was written than it does about the Hohokam" (*Ecological* 72). In an attempt to account for Krech's apparent bias, Kimberly TallBear insists that Krech is "in denial about the culpability of Whites. This book is, after all, about debunking the stereotype of the ecological Indian, not about adding to the literature that discusses White degradation of land and natural resources" (TallBear 2). And Krech, in attempting to establish a context and explanation for alternative points of view, makes an important suggestion concerning the impact of an anthropologist's or historian's own time period as influence on theory—earthquake theory when the historian experiences earthquake, flood theory in times of flood, drought in times of drought, or salinization when salinization is topical. But Krech does not seem to be cognizant of his era (late 1990s) and its possible influences on his own thesis.

Despite Krech's many troubling contentions throughout the book, it is his chapter on the demise of the buffalo that is perhaps the most often cited and reviewed as one of the most problematic. It is thus on the buffalo chapter that I would like to pause. The author of one somewhat favorable review of *The Ecological Indian* argues that readers should consider Krech's work by "the evidence presented and the manner in which it is presented" (TallBear 4). That's what I'd like to do here, look at the manner in which Krech presents his evidence.

By describing a young Piegan boy who has his head crushed against the cliff that the buffalo are being forced over in what he portrays as a typical Piegan buffalo jump hunt, Krech begins his "Buffalo" chapter with a rhetorical strategy that might be called an emotional appeal. Krech's point here is that, because of their excess, such buffalo jumps are wasteful; but the emotional point is made with the description of the death of a human boy, not the killing of buffalo. To follow up his description of the boy's death, Krech refers to what he calls "the rhetoric of buffalo hunting," a rhetoric he maintains other writers use to condemn white hunters for driving the buffalo to extinction by over hunting (*Ecological* 123). The bias, if one can call it such, is also evident in his discussion of how Native Americans eat buffalo. He notes that the "Indians had far broader canons of edibility than the white people who observed them" (*Ecological* 132). Krech barely

mentions "preparing and drying meat for future consumption," yet devotes much space to a discussion of eating the meat of drowned or rotting buffalo, quoting at length: "Indians ate drowned buffaloes 'no matter how putrid their flesh may be' " (*Ecological* 132–33). He focuses on customs that many of his readers may well find unappetizing even though he could just have readily quoted a Canadian fur trader who, after some of the women cut up the meat of these drowned buffalo, comments that "the flesh appeared to be fresh and good" (qtd. in Geist 39). But for whatever reasons he chooses to focus on what his mainstream readers would certainly find less appetizing.

Although he does not state it outright, through the examples he chooses, Krech implies that American Indians were not good sportsmen in the way they went about their buffalo killing. Through reference to authority, as it were, Krech echoes the Puritan argument that because Indians spent all their time hunting, a leisure practice for the relatively wealthy Europeans and European immigrants, they were indolent and lazy, that they suffered from a lack of a good work ethic. Krech's focus here is on what white hunters found repulsive about Native American hunting practices: "For those [white hunters] who considered themselves sportsmen, this was hardly the 'proper' or 'sporting' way to hunt and kill buffaloes" (*Ecological* 130). The good sportsmen Krech refers to, though does not actually elaborate on, were evidently those shooting buffalo from trains as they passed by the herds. As reiterated by LaDuke: "Those railroads moved the hunters in and the hides out, and were the vehicle for an astonishing slaughter. . . . as historian Tom McHugh wrote, 'it often happens that the cars and buffalo would be side by side for a mile or two . . . during these races, the car windows are opened, and numerous breech-loaders fling hundreds of bullets among the densely crowded and flying masses' " (LaDuke's ellipsis). LaDuke also quotes United States Army colonel Richard Irving Dodge who notes that between winter 1871 and fall 1873, the herds disappeared: " 'where there were myriads of buffalo the years before, there was now a myriad of carcasses. The air was foul with a sickening stench, and the vast plain, which only a short twelve months before teemed with animal life, was a dead, solitary, putrid desert' " (qtd. in LaDuke 142, 143). Krech spends very little space on white hunting (as TallBear explains), choosing instead to highlight unsportsmanlike hunting practices and unappetizing

uses of the buffalo by Native Americans. Krech glosses over the contribution of the United States Army, maintaining that there is too little evidence to accuse anyone of intentionally exterminating buffalo as a means of ridding the Plains of Indians.

By making only brief mention of the overtly expressed initiative on the part of the United States military to kill the buffalo as a means of destroying the Native Americans, Krech offers a sanitized, almost euphemistic, gloss. He writes merely that many white hunters were "urged on by governmental spokesmen who proclaimed that each buffalo killed meant fewer Indians" (*Ecological* 127). Indeed, he writes, "extermination [of the buffalo was seen] as inevitable in the wake of the westward course of the empire as a progressive impetus in bringing civilization to native people" (*Ecological* 127). Krech's language echoes nineteenth-century articulations of the same sentiment, a sentiment inherent in the concept of Manifest Destiny. In contrast to Krech, LaDuke implies the likelihood of a systematic extermination program when she cites a passage attributed to Philip Sheridan. According to this passage, the army general argues before the Texas legislature in 1875 that killing the buffalo was the surest means of freeing the lands of Indian people for white settlement, and he applauds the work of the non-Indian buffalo hunters. The killing of buffalo, he asserts, has done "more to settle the vexed Indian question than the entire regular army has done in the last thirty years. . . . let them kill, skin, and sell until the buffalo are exterminated. Then your prairie can be covered with speckled cattle and the festive cowboy who follows the hunter as the second forerunner of an advanced civilization" (qtd. in LaDuke 141). Such a passage demonstrates not only that people in positions of power were fully aware of the adverse effects of hunting the buffalo, but also that they actually knowingly encouraged it. LaDuke wants her readers to recognize as much.

It is with a similar silence that Krech gives only the briefest of mention to the fact that the buffalo's precontact range in North America was essentially from central Canada to southern Texas and from coast to coast. He fails to mention or suggest causes for the total absence of buffalo east of the Mississippi River by 1833 (see *Ecological* 126). Weren't these eastern buffalo hunted to extinction by European Americans within a few decades of contact? According to Paul Johnsgard the "early colonists of the eastern coastal region . . . probably began eliminating bison as best they could to

provide more grazing lands for their cattle. . . . Two bison killed in central Wisconsin in 1832 may have been the last remnants of the herds east of the Mississippi River" (Johnsgard 14). Another apparent fault in the logic of figures based on daily consumption is the fact that buffalo jumps demand the right sort of hill or that driving buffalo onto thin ice demands not only the appropriate geography but also the appropriate weather. As Geist argues, "the systematic herding of bison over 'jumps' was a difficult feat to engineer" (Geist 43).

In addition to his rhetorical strategies, including silences, that seem to denigrate Native Americans as buffalo hunters, Krech uses data gleaned primarily from Dan Flores concerning the demise of the American bison. Relying on Flores's estimate of 2.5 million horses, for example, Krech maintains that every million horses "meant a million fewer bison that could be supported" (*Ecological* 138). If we accept Flores's argument (reiterated by Krech) that horses and buffalo were competing for the same watering areas, one must still account for the fact that even with competition from the horse and even using the more efficient means of hunting (on horseback), for about two centuries beginning in the late seventeenth century, Plains Indians satisfied their need for bison, *after* the domestication of the horse, without compromising the buffalo herd populations, a deed that some argue evidently took European American hunters a mere twelve years to accomplish, 1871–1883.

In his calculations of how many bison could support how many people for how long, Krech leaves out of his argument or merely glosses over the fact that buffalo did survive for thousands upon thousands of years though subject to Indian precontact hunting practices. Even two centuries after the Plains Indians had domesticated the horse, the buffalo herds were healthy. Krech fails to acknowledge this fact even though the rebuttal of his argument is embedded within his own statements: based on archeological evidence, he reports, communal hunting "is an ancient technique used to kill buffaloes for well over eleven thousand years. At different seasons but especially in winter, people used sites repeatedly over hundreds or thousands of years" (*Ecological* 143). The collector William Hornaday—after hunting bison for his own museum collection—lamented the near extinction of the buffalo, blamed Indian hunting practices, and called for preservation initiatives. According to Geist, it "is now difficult to compre-

hend how Hornaday could have missed what appears to be obvious even from his own account—that the extermination of the bison was an unspoken national policy of the United States government, and the hide and tongue hunters mere instruments of that policy" (Geist 69). In "Buffalo Nation," a chapter in his study of the shortgrass prairie, Paul Johnsgard writes that "[b]etween 1870 and 1875 an estimated 2.5 million bison were being slaughtered per year, perhaps the greatest mass killing of large mammals in history" (Johnsgard 15). Such historical reflections suggest a stark contrast between the results of Indian and non-Indian hunting practices. They indicate that Native American hunting systems worked for thousands of years without significantly damaging the overall buffalo populations. Only with white hunting after the 1860s did the buffalo become endangered and only then driven nearly extinct as a species.

Krech mentions white hunting only in passing, but does concede that "native demand, drought, the competition from horses, disease, and fires did not ultimately doom the buffalo. What doomed the buffalo, were new markets and improved means of transportation" (*Ecological* 138). This assertion is corroborated by Isenberg in his book *The Destruction of the Bison,* where he concludes that a "spasm of industrial expansion was the primary cause of the bison's near-extinction in the 1870s and early 1880s" (Isenberg, *Destruction* 130). Although Isenberg's book would not have been available to Krech, Harold Danz's *Of Bison and Man* (published in 1997) would have been, yet Krech overlooks altogether Danz's conclusion that "[t]he Southern Herd . . . was basically wiped out between 1870–1874. The Northern Herd . . . was systematically destroyed between 1876 and 1883" (Danz 112). That is, argues Danz, the buffalo were exterminated in about a dozen years of white hunting. In addition to Danz's and other recent studies making essentially the same argument, Ralph Andrist's study, *The Long Death*, in which he makes note of the European American contribution to buffalo extermination, had been available for decades and had been reprinted as recently as 1993.

In his arguments about the decline of the buffalo population, Krech relies heavily on Dan Flores's environmental history of the buffalo on the Southern Plains. It is Flores who argues for a maximum of thirty million buffalo, for example, the number that Krech uses to do his calculations. Flores also writes, however—and this is not mentioned by Krech—that

given tribe populations on the Southern Plains and their needs for bison, as few as six million buffalo "would have supported the subsistence needs of more than sixty thousand Plains hunters" (Flores, "Bison" 65). Krech, in contrast, argues that because of factors other than Indian hunting, thirty million buffalo would not sustain the 120,000 Plains hunters. Johnsgard makes different use of the numbers, arguing that the buffalo-hunting Native Americans would have needed about two million buffalo a year and that a "herd of 30 million bison should produce about 6 million calves per year, or more than enough to cover the herd's losses to Native hunters" (Johnsgard 14). Flores writes that "[d]rought, coupled with Indian market hunting and cow selectivity, must stand as the critical element—albeit augmented by more minor factors such as white disturbance, new bovine diseases, and increasing grazing competition from horses—that explains the bison crisis of the mid-century Southern Plains" (Flores, "Bison" 68). Flores isolates the "minor factor" of "white disturbance," yet like Krech he refuses to acknowledge that all the factors he lists (with the exception of wolf predation and climate change) are results of white disturbance, including bovine diseases such as anthrax from Louisiana cattle, brucellosis from Texas cattle, and tuberculosis. Even the grazing competition from horses is finally a result of white disturbance. He even separates the market for buffalo robes from "white disturbance" that created a "swelling demand for bison robes generated by the Euro-American market" (Flores, "Bison" 68). Flores gives short shrift to additional predation on bison: "Traders along the Santa Fe Trail shot into, chased, and disturbed the southern herds. New Mexican Ciboleros continued to take fifteen thousand to twenty-five thousand bison a year from the Llano Estacado. The U.S. government's removal of more than eighty thousand Eastern Indians into Oklahoma accelerated the pressure on the bison herds" (Flores, "Bison" 67). All this is shrugged off by Flores and hence by Krech, who relies heavily on Flores's arguments; Flores lumps together all such instances of white disturbance as constituting only a minor factor in bison extermination.

Despite the apparent rhetorical biases, what opponents find perhaps most troubling about Krech's argument is his summation of Native American religion as interfering with an understanding of bison biology. Flores too presents a somewhat problematic sketch, beginning with his reference to Indian religion in the context of buffalo hunting. Flores contends, and

his contention is echoed by Krech, that "Indian religions, so effective at calling forth awe and reverence for the natural world, may have inhibited the Plains Indians' understanding of bison ecology and their role in it" (Flores, "Bison" 69). Flores refers to the common Plains Indian beliefs both that bison were innumerable and that they emerged from the ground. He implies that this belief demonstrates that Indians did not understand the most basic biology of bison reproduction or that they were unable to distinguish between biological fact and what he calls religious belief. Flores puts forward this view of equating religious views with ignorance of the natural world even though he himself acknowledges that "Indians had no doubt many times witnessed the herds emerging from the canyons, as if from the ground." Interestingly, after making this claim, Flores adds that the concept of buffalo coming from under the ground was very possibly metaphorical anyway: "This religious conception of the infinity of nature's abundance was poetic. On one level it was also empirical. Buffalo wintered in canyons" (Flores, "Bison" 69–70). Nevertheless, he posits "Indian religions" as an explanation for their willingness (through ignorance) to drive the species to near extinction.

Krech echoes Flores's attitude toward the place of religion in Plains Indian culture, writing that "[m]any Plains Indians believed that buffaloes came originally from beneath lakes and that they emerged from underground through certain cave mouths, springs, or other egresses" (*Ecological* 148). Krech then asks a series of rhetorical questions: "If buffaloes returned each year from the earth because they were of the earth, how could they possibly go extinct? How could one kill too many if one held to this belief?" (*Ecological* 148, 149). The suggestion here is that both Flores and Krech embrace a false dichotomy, one that separates religious belief from knowledge of biology. That embrace suggests a flaw in their arguments, a flaw that results in part from their inability or refusal to acknowledge a point of view other than the dominant Western one where religious faith might indeed tend to demand a willing ignorance of biology.

In the context of religion, perhaps the focus should not be on how many buffalo (or deer or beaver) Indian hunters killed (even the staunchest opponents of Krech's argument agree that Native Americans exploited their environment), but rather the focus should be on how those hunters understood their relationship to the land and the animals and what their

hunting meant, on how they conceived of interdependencies, and on how they perceived the physical world in relation to the spiritual. Krech suggests as much in passing when he writes that "[p]erhaps conservation and waste should be construed in other than narrowly utilitarian terms. It may be that wasting one's total relationship with buffaloes—a relationship expressed in religious and kinship idiom as well as in other ways—was far more risky than wasting a hide or an entire herd" (*Ecological* 149). The concept of a "total relationship" is important. Although Krech maintains that such relations "can easily be exaggerated" (149), the very possibility of such relationships suggests that the Plains hunter may well have enjoyed a worldview and understanding of the relationship between human and bison radically different from dominant Western understandings. After contact, of course, any such relationships, subject to evolution and change anyway, were undoubtedly in radical flux, and thus hunting practices of the nineteenth century must be measured by a different ruler altogether.

Despite his recognition of the possibility of a different worldview, Krech seems to ignore warnings against insisting on a dichotomy between religion and ecological or biological knowledge that his argument is based on. In "American Indian Environmental Religions," for example, Christopher Vecsey argues that "[w]e cannot accept the conception of Indians as conservationists in a modern Western sense. We must understand Indians' environmental attitudes on their own terms" (Vecsey 8). According to Vecsey—whom neither Krech nor Flores acknowledges—in addition to being "empirical observers of animal habits," American Indians on the Plains knew and used virtually every part of a buffalo, just as in "the Southwest Indians utilized practically every part of mesquite, screwbean, yucca, stool, beargrass, agave, and other wild plants" (Vecsey 9). Moreover, according to Vecsey, Native Americans "were not fuzzy in their systematic thought. However, they were capable of more than systematizing. . . . All entities in the Indian world view were potentially equivalent. A word could stand for the thing it spoke of; a human in animal skin could be the animal. There was the ability of interaction; a human could say in truth, 'I *am* a deer'" (Vecsey 16). Although Vecsey's contentions do not preclude American Indian complicity in endangering the buffalo (and deer and beaver) populations, it is precisely this distinction in worldview, assert Krech's critics, that weakens the argument that American Indians' belief systems doomed

the buffalo. That is, the argument runs, the Plains hunter knew what he was about. He knew his prey. He knew bison biology and bison habits intimately, and religious belief did not muddle that knowledge, nor did it demand a willful ignorance.

In *Red Matters*, Arnold Krupat makes a similar point concerning one's ability to fuse the literal and metaphorical. He refers to Greg Dening (*Performances* 1996) to argue that history "is public knowledge of the past . . . public in the sense of being culturally shared" (Dening, qtd. in Krupat, *Red* 49). And this notion of true history goes both ways. Krupat's example comes from an account of several Cheyenne warriors' successful evasion of pursuing soldiers. When they relate that they "could elude the pursuing soldiers [because they] turned them[selves] into buffalo, we need not assume that the Cheyenne are insisting factually, literally, empirically that the warriors became four-legged creatures. . . . If that is the only way we can understand 'turned into buffalo,' then we confront the need for translation that is indeed a mediation between Our language for history and Theirs, an anti-imperial translation" (Krupat, *Red* 71). In her study of ecofeminism and American Indian literature, Donelle N. Dreese suggests the limitations of a narrow point of view about what constitutes history when she writes that "it has been historically inconceivable to Western modes of thought to suggest such an all-encompassing connection between the environment and the state of human existence as viable" (Dreese 7–8). The willingness and ability to consider and accept other worldviews raises interesting questions in this context. Where does one draw the line between the literal and the figurative in a belief system? Can the buffalo come both literally and figuratively out of the ground? Can they winter or migrate on the bottoms of lakes? Or are the metaphorical, or to use Flores's word, poetic, and literal expressions for well-understood and often observed zoological facts mutually exclusive?

Many Native American writers seem able to effectively bridge the gap created by the Western dichotomy between nature and culture, or between biology and religion; they do so by acknowledging and articulating a complex relationship with the nonhuman world. At the same time, however, they argue that a European-engendered dualistic philosophy creates the divide—like that to which Krech himself subscribes—that actually resulted in the near extinction of the buffalo. As Vine Deloria Jr. comments, "I'm sure

some Indians did over hunt . . . but dragging up some ancient [buffalo-jump] incident does not cancel out what happened to this continent since the whites appeared" (V. Deloria, qtd. in TallBear 2). The concept itself writes Native Americans out of history. As LaDuke suggests in *All Our Relations*, the destruction of the buffalo and the prairie is a result of, or has at its foundation, "a spiritual mistake: killing without reverence" (LaDuke 147). In the context of approaches to understanding Krech's comment about the dangers of wasting a "total relationship with buffaloes" the suggestion is that perhaps readers of a culture are so restricted by one worldview, or one set of values, that they fail to comprehend or appreciate another. Specifically, the science of ecology and the notion of conservation, as Krech points out, are recent developments. Defined as twentieth-century phenomena, they cannot apply to pre-twentieth-century peoples or situations. Thus, in a sense, Krech is superimposing two radically different epistemologies. What reviewers have asked, however, are questions about the significance of these differences in attitudes toward and treatment of the land and animals.

Like Sam Gill, Krech mentions Charles Eastman in passing, as one of the "most important writers for Noble Indians," pointing especially to *The Soul of the Indian* (1911), noting that Eastman "painted his boyhood with his relatives as natural, altruistic, and reverent, and his current life as artificial, selfish, and materialistic" (*Ecological* 19). What Krech doesn't mention is Eastman's ability to fuse religion and spiritual belief with everyday life, essentially not even acknowledging the dichotomy inherent in Western conceptions of the spiritual. In *The Soul of the Indian*, Eastman writes that "[e]very act of his life is, in a very real sense, a religious act" (Eastman 47). In his account of the coming of the sacred pipe, Black Elk recounts and explains the discovery of an "old woman" whose "hair was pure white" in the womb of a buffalo. Like Eastman, Black Elk thus also fuses the spiritual and the physical, attributing the arrival of the pipe to the White Buffalo Cow Woman: "This woman was really a white buffalo. Thus the respect for the white buffalo. . . . After she went back she sang another song. As she went out of the tipi everyone saw a white buffalo kicking up her hind legs and leaving in a hurry, snorting as she went" (Black Elk, *Sixth* 284–85). According to Raymond DeMaille, Black Elk believed "the Indian has been an animal changed into a human. He says, if Indians were animals, the fact

that the white men are killing off animals [means that] perhaps when the wild animals are all gone the Indians will also be all gone" (Black Elk, *Sixth* 285). Luther Standing Bear, another early twentieth-century Sioux writer, offers a grim account of reservation Indians being forced to rely on cattle for food rather than buffalo because, as he says, our "own wild buffalo had been disappearing very rapidly, as the white people had been killing them as fast as possible" (Standing Bear, *My People* 59) Standing Bear demonstrates another sort of ability to bridge a gap created by the Western mindset. In recounting his early life on the Plains in *My People the Sioux* (published in 1928), Standing Bear points out the devastation of the buffalo the European Americans wrought, yet he describes himself as also very much a buffalo killer.

Unlike Krech, who looks back and who is concerned with Indians of the past, Winona LaDuke in *All Our Relations* is very much interested in the present and the future. As Haunani-Kay Trask notes in her review, LaDuke's book is about tribal survivors who "continue to transform grief into resistance" (Trask 18). And moving from the present into the future, in the context of the buffalo on the prairies, LaDuke writes that many "would argue that the ecological future of the Great Plains is intertwined with the psychological and spiritual relationship the prairies and the people of the prairies have with the buffalo, and with American culture and mythology" (LaDuke 147). In the context of buffalo, LaDuke recalls that it "is said that should the Earth, the mother of all life, ever be shaken to crisis by the people living upon her, then the White Buffalo Calf Woman will return. In the summer of 1995, a white buffalo calf was born in southern Wisconsin." LaDuke maintains that the birth of the calf brought hope and that the "return of the White Buffalo Calf Woman symbolizes the beginning of a new time, a new era, and with it the promise of restoration" (LaDuke 140). LaDuke does not argue that the calf is to be taken only literally or only symbolically. Yes, there is a literal flesh-and-blood calf born in Wisconsin, but the significance of the literal birth is in the hope that birth offers and in the renewal it symbolizes. LaDuke is able to accept and account for two different conceptions (literal and symbolic) of the white buffalo calf woman at once.

In contrast to Standing Bear (who according to his autobiography actually did participate in a buffalo hunt, described below), James Welch

envisions a hunt as graceful on the part of the hunter and as virtually painless on the part of the hunted buffalo, the blackhorn. In the novel *Fools Crow*, Welch writes that "Fools Crow rode hard behind the big cow. . . . The blackhorn ran with her head down, her eye rimmed with white, her tongue lolling out of the side of her mouth. . . . When he got even with her shoulder, he raised the rifle to his cheek and fired. The shooter entered the blackhorn's body just behind the shoulder and the front legs collapsed. Her momentum caused her to skid several paces on her chin. Then she rolled onto her left side, her back legs still kicking. She bellowed once, then lay quiet" (Welch 179). Welch imbues the buffalo with much more than mere literal meaning. For Welch in *Fools Crow*, as several critics have pointed out, the blackhorn is central to the Blackfeets' way of life. One critic, Blanca Chester, argues that Welch "attempts to locate the point at which external pressures overwhelmed traditional structures [among the Blackfeet] for accommodating change" and one of those pressures is growing scarcity of buffalo. Chester suggests that the "buffalo were so important to Blackfeet culture that the notion of their coming back sometime in the future makes manifest the recuperative theme of the novel" (Chester 97–98).

Despite Welch's optimism in reference to the buffalo and his imbuing the buffalo with the symbolic import of embodying the future of the people, the actual depictions of buffalo in his novel do not suggest regeneration; rather they seem to express lament and decline. At one point Owl Child and Crow Top observe an old buffalo at a distance: "One bull lay in the sun, his eyes closed, his large head nodding in sleep. His withers were gaunt and his tail was crusted with shit. A single fly, hatched by the warm winds, crawled over the mucus in the corner of his eye. The bull did not know where he was anymore. His breath came in harsh gasps, but he did not care that he was dying" (Welch 207). Owl Child acknowledges the buffalo's suffering, but chooses not to alleviate it: "Any other time Owl Child would have practiced his shooting—to put the old one out of his misery—but not now. They were too close to the ranch" (Welch 209). As Seth Bovey points out, "Welch reveals the dynamics of the historical situation by associating the blackhorn with Blackfeet tradition and whitehorns with the destruction of that tradition" (Bovey 130–31). Welch's character Rides-at-the-Door points out the white complicity even in Blackfeet subsistence hunting when he acknowledges of himself and his fellow hunters:

we "kill the blackhorns with their bullets" (Welch 255). These two very different depictions of the centrality of buffalo in *Fools Crow* suggest the complexity of Welch's depiction as it reflects the intricacy of his characters' interactions with buffalo specifically and the natural world in general. What hopefulness there is at the end of the novel is grounded in the assumption of the ability to hunt. The men talk of hunting and the women prepare a "meager feast": "They know that soon the meat pots would be full and the hides would be drying in the sun" (Welch 390). In the 1870s, yes. But not by the mid-1880s and into the 1890s.

Unlike Welch, who earnestly depicts the place of buffalo in Native American life, Thomas King, in his novel *Truth and Brightwater*, makes his point by joking about the controversy over extermination of the buffalo:

> "Those history books you get in school say that railroad sharpshooters killed off all the buffalo, but that's not true. [. . .] Most of them just took off and never came back."
> [. . .]
> "Just like that. [. . .] Soon as the smart ones got a good look at Whites, they took off."
> [. . .]
> "That's the mistake we made. [. . .] We should have gone with them."
> (King 90–91)

King's sense of humor, but humor with teeth, also applies to the buffalo hunt offered during the Indian Days festival where tourists ride in a motorcycle sidecar and shoot real buffaloes with a paint gun. Meanwhile, the artist Monroe Swimmer places buffalo decoys across the prairie, insisting that they will bring back the real animal: " 'Each day the herd will grow larger and larger. . . . Before we're done, the buffalo will return' " (King 135).

In *The Way to Rainy Mountain* N. Scott Momaday quotes James Mooney, who writes that by the summer of 1879 on the southern plains "the buffalo had become so scarce that the Kiowa, who had gone on their regular hunt the preceding winter, had found so few [buffalo] that they were obliged to kill and eat their ponies. . . . This may be recorded as the date of the disappearance of the buffalo from the Kiowa country. Thenceforth the appearance of even a single animal was a rare event" (qtd. in Momaday, *Way*

67). In the context of the buffalo, Momaday declares simply that "the white man destroyed the buffalo." As a part of the ritual of the Sun Dance, the Kiowas had typically tied a buffalo skull to the sacred tree. But in 1887, there were no more buffalo: "Perhaps the most immoral act ever committed against the land was the senseless killing of the buffalo," muses Momaday in his essay "The Morality of Indian Hating" (Momaday, *Man* 66). In a prose poem, "The Colors of Night," Momaday demonstrates his ability to imbue the buffalo with both literal and symbolic significance in a single image. In the poem he uses a vivid description of the death of a buffalo as a metaphor for a sunset, thus lamenting the death of a single bison at the same time that he implies the demise of a species through the image of the end of a single day; the section is entitled "Purple": "There was a man who killed a buffalo bull to no purpose, only he wanted its blood on his hands. It was a great, old, noble beast, and it was a long time blowing its life away. On the edge of the night the people gathered themselves up in their grief and shame." In this way, Momaday describes the literal individual death, "to no purpose" and at the same time suggests that that death constitutes something much larger. Only then does the buffalo's death become a metaphor for the sunset itself: "Away in the west they could see the hump and spine of the huge beast which lay dying along the edge of the world. They could see its bright blood run into the sky, where it dried, darkening, and was at last flecked with flakes of light" (Momaday, *In the Presence* 30).

Immediately following his insistence that white people had wastefully destroyed the buffalo, Luther Standing Bear recounts his own (his one and only) buffalo hunt. The focus of the description is on the long and painful death of the buffalo (because of his own lack of experience and expertise) and the young Standing Bear's hurt pride. Shortly after the description of the hunt, Standing Bear the author returns to an account of wasteful white hunting: "Our scouts, who had gone out to locate the buffalo, came back and reported that the plains were covered with dead bison. These had been shot by the white people. The Indians never were such wasteful, wanton killers of this noble game animal. . . . I saw the bodies of hundreds of dead buffalo lying about, just wasting, and the odor was terrible" (Standing Bear, *My People* 67). By framing his own buffalo hunt with accounts of the massacre of the species by non-Indians, Standing Bear acknowledges

his own complicity, but at the same time he sets himself apart. Through the detailed description of the single hunt, he draws the reader's attention to the monstrosity of the situation. If his killing a single bison can be so vexed and that individual animal's death so painful, he suggests, the fact of such deaths by the millions is simply inconceivable. Standing Bear thus allows no easy dichotomy nor seems to need any.

The white man has come to be the symbol of extinction
for all things natural to this continent.
—*Luther Standing Bear,* Land of the Spotted Eagle

CHAPTER THREE

Between the People and the Land
Luther Standing Bear, Mother Earth, and Assimilation

Luther Standing Bear receives no mention in Sam Gill's discussion of the Mother Earth phenomenon in America, even though this Lakota writer refers explicitly to "Mother Earth" throughout his 1933 book *Land of the Spotted Eagle.* Indeed, by recounting his experiences as a boy and a young man, Standing Bear in this autobiographical work describes the pre-twentieth-century culture of the Lakotas for whom, according to the author, Mother Earth played a crucial role. Insofar as Standing Bear wrote his book as an adult in the first third of the twentieth century, the experiences off the reservation of his youth certainly must have informed his attitudes and his writing. Standing Bear attended the Indian boarding school at Carlisle in Pennsylvania, he traveled the United States and Europe with the Wild West Show, and he worked as an actor in Hollywood before returning to the reservation for a brief visit in 1931. Thus the reader must understand Standing Bear as one who views his youth and young adulthood through the lens of a Carlisle education and from the perspective of an acculturated and well-traveled man, as one whose Lakota childhood is already forty years behind him by the time he comes

to write his account of that childhood and the nineteenth-century culture of his tribe.

In addition to the question of the extent to which Standing Bear has been acculturated by the time he writes *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, there is also the question of authorship. According to Frederick Hale, who is to date one of the very few to devote a critical essay exclusively to Standing Bear's literary achievements, the extent to which Standing Bear's first book, *My People the Sioux*, "is Standing Bear's own work is probably impossible to ascertain. It was edited by E. A. Brininstool, a white writer of western lore and fiction. Much of the prose rings true, however, and bears the stamp of naïve plausibility" (*My People* xx). As far as the writing of another book, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, is concerned, Standing Bear himself acknowledges the help and assistance of his niece Warcaziwin and of Melvin Gilmore, curator of ethnology at the University of Michigan at the time. Melvin Gilmore writes the brief introduction to the book, but he makes no mention of the work's not being Standing Bear's. In his more recent foreword to *My People the Sioux*, Richard Ellis does not mention any concerns over authorship, writing simply that Standing Bear's works "are not superb examples of literary art" (*My People* xix). The aesthetic judgment aside, readers are left to assume that regardless of whatever editorial help he might have gotten, the books do reflect Standing Bear's own thoughts, memories, and attitudes.

The perhaps irresolvable issue of authorship and authority and the issue of acculturation as it might have affected Standing Bear's ideas of Native American relationship to the land notwithstanding, it is instructive to look at how the author Standing Bear presents the idea of "Mother Earth." He refers specifically and explicitly to Mother Earth several times in his book *Land of the Spotted Eagle.* In the chapter "Indian Wisdom," for example, as a part of his discussion of the natural world he writes that "[w]herever the Lakota went, he was with Mother Earth. No matter where he roamed by day or slept by night, he was safe with her. This thought comforted and sustained the Lakota and he was eternally filled with gratitude" (*Land* 192–93). Standing Bear describes the Native American, specifically the Lakota, as a lover of nature, as one who literally wants to touch the earth, the soil. The author reiterates this idea when he writes of religion, exclaiming that Lakota "altars were built upon the ground. . . . They were made of sacred earth and placed upon the holiest of all places—the lap of Mother Earth"

(*Land* 200). He refers to the genesis of the Lakota people through a story he recounts early in the book: "our legends tell us that it was hundreds and perhaps thousands of years ago since the first man sprang from the soil in the midst of these great plains" (*Land* 44). The first man drew himself from the earth itself, exclaims Standing Bear, and now, "[w]e sit in the lap of our Mother" (*Land* 194). He implies that the connection to the earth is completely organic: "We are of the soil and the soil is of us" (*Land* 45). In addition to his frequent references to Mother Earth specifically, Standing Bear weaves into the very fabric of the book the close link that he perceives, and he argues that Lakota people in general perceive, between human beings and the nonhuman natural world. He also maintains and explains the important connection he sees between human beings and nonhuman animals and plants. The connection is literally from the ground up; humans are connected with the soil, the air, and even with the weather.

Also important is the fact that in other contexts Standing Bear describes the earth as female, as mother, but in terms different from typical references to or conceptions of Mother Earth as a goddess. His reverence for the earth is clearly evident in these passages, but there is not necessarily the notion of the earth as a goddess. When he describes the Lakotas' sacred lands in and around the Black Hills in South Dakota, for instance, he writes of "the earth mother," but uses the lower case and follows this reference with the following clarification: "According to tribal legend [the Black Hills] were a reclining female figure from whose breast flowed life-giving forces, and to them the Lakota went as a child to its mother's arms" (*Land* 43). Like the assertion that humans come from the earth, in this passage too Standing Bear seems to acknowledge that he recognizes a human's debt to and close relationship with the earth without necessarily conferring divine or goddesslike status on the earth. He writes that a person's "very thoughts were drawn from the land he called native" (*Land* 212). Such a passage is indicative of how conceptions of the earth, or the soil, express how the idea of a Lakota's necessary connection to the earth permeates the entire book.

Scholars have not concerned themselves with Standing Bear's references to Mother Earth or with his prominent concern with the human relationship with the earth. Rather, as indicated by Frederick Hale's reading, of importance for literary critics has been the issue of Standing Bear's attitudes toward assimilation. Hale maintains that in the two books *My People*

the Sioux and *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, "one finds two fundamentally different, though not diametrically opposed, perspectives on the general question of assimilation into white society" (Hale 26). According to LaVonne Ruoff as well, the latter book, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, "focuses far more on Sioux beliefs, customs, and life than did *My People the Sioux*, and is far more critical of white treatment of Indians" (Ruoff, *American* 57). In the earlier book, it can be argued, Standing Bear reveals a generally positive view toward assimilation. In the later book, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, in contrast, he more forthrightly condemns white society and its exploitation of the Lakota people and the taking of their lands. There is, then, for the most part a critical consensus that in *My People the Sioux,* Standing Bear argues for assimilation whereas in *Land of the Spotted Eagle* he is much more critical of white culture and therefore of assimilation into that culture.

The assimilationist status of that first book, *My People the Sioux,* notwithstanding, one can find in it any number of instances in which Standing Bear does make pointed comparisons between Indians and European Americans, comparisons that put those of European descent in an unfavorable light. A few examples from the text make this point clear. Unlike what he describes as generous, honest, and selfless Lakota chiefs, who were "dignified and sincere," he describes white politicians as men who do not keep their promises, men interested only in "feather[ing] their own nests" (*My People* 59). This is but one instance, indicating that "the Government did such foolish things" (*My People* 71). Standing Bear also describes how the buffalo were "disappearing very rapidly, as the white people had been killing them as fast as possible" (*My People* 59), noting that "the plains were covered with dead bison. These had been shot by the white people. The Indians never were such wasteful, wanton killers of this noble game animal" (*My People* 67). In another context he maintains that "the white men who came West in those days were not friends of the Indian" (*My People* 87). In addition to his sometimes rather harsh critique of white culture in *My People the Sioux*, there is external evidence that Standing Bear may not have been as proassimilationist as many have argued. In an essay he published in the *American Mercury* between the writing of the two books, Standing Bear describes his own attempt to assimilate as a failure: "I had tried to live a peaceful and happy life, tried to adapt myself and make readjustments to fit the white man's mode of existence. But I was unsuccessful"

("Tragedy" 273). If not in 1928 when he published *My People the Sioux*, certainly by 1931 and the publication of his *American Mercury* article, Standing Bear has and expresses serious reservations about the suitability and even possibility of assimilation.

Despite the argument of the *American Mercury* article and the pointed accusations in *My People the Sioux*, scholars do indeed argue, however, that the book is more about the importance of assimilation than about issues of racism and brutality in the European American response to and treatment of the Lakotas and their lands. Their arguments come from passages like the following, in which Standing Bear does seem to advocate assimilation: recalling his father's advice to "be brave and get killed," for instance, he writes that "my father had made a mistake. He should have told me, upon leaving home, to go and learn all I could of the white man's ways, and be like them" (*My People* 141). Thus, by and large, most scholars agree with Hale that the earlier book is indeed more about praising assimilation than condemning white culture.

Coinciding with the proassimilationist stance that one is tempted to see in *My People the Sioux* is the nearly total absence of references to reverence toward nature that are so obvious in the second book. Hale makes only a passing reference to Standing Bear's attitude toward the landscape, suggesting, for example, that his "detachment from nature" in Los Angeles may have contributed to his sense of disillusionment with European America (Hale 33), or that according to Standing Bear the Lakota were a "cultivated people well-adjusted to their natural environment" (Hale 35). But Hale otherwise does not refer to Standing Bear's articulation of a close relationship with nature, and nowhere does Hale mention Standing Bear's many references to mother earth.

It is certainly worthy of note that for all Standing Bear's discussion of closeness to nature and appreciation for and acknowledgment of Mother Earth in his second book, there is indeed little of the sort in *My People the Sioux*, the book that praises and has been said to actually advocate assimilation. Even when the opportunity presents itself, in fact, Standing Bear avoids any mention of such. He describes his own childhood hunting several times, for example, but never once does he mention any reverence for the hunted; he makes no allusion to prayer, nor does he ever hint at a philosophy of reciprocity between the hunter and the hunted. This lacuna is

striking. Writing about the notion of reciprocity in Native American hunting practices, George Tinker points out that "hunting and war typically involved a complex ceremonial preparation before a contingent of warriors left their home." And furthermore, adds Tinker, "[e]ven after the hunt or battle, those who participated must invariably go through a ceremonial cleansing before re-entering their own village. Not to do this would bring the disruption of the sacred caused by the perpetration of violence right into the middle of national life and put all people at risk" (Tinker 161–62). Winona LaDuke makes a similar point in *All Our Relations*: "When you take a buffalo, there is a Lakota ceremony, the Buffalo Kill ceremony. In that ceremony, the individual offers prayers and talks to the sprit of the animal. Then, and only then, will the buffalo surrender itself. That is when you can kill the buffalo" (LaDuke 148). Curiously then, despite such widespread social strictures concerning a human's relationship with and responsibility toward nature, the young man described in Standing Bear's autobiography hunts and fishes without ceremony.

Not only does he hunt and fish without ceremony, Standing Bear even describes hunting without need. In the most obvious instance, he describes his wanting to try out a new six-shooter, and he narrates that he goes to shoot rabbits, not for the rabbits, their meat or pelts, but just for the pleasure: "I did not care whether we shot any rabbits or not, for the loud report of the gun was all I wanted" (*My People* 89). When he recounts his one and only buffalo hunt, he writes of killing the buffalo without mention of any sort of thankfulness or offering. Indeed, he describes a long and torturous death for the buffalo, and the focus of his account is not on the animal or even the hunt itself but on the potential for his having embarrassed himself when others find that he had to use five arrows to bring down his prey. Rather than on the animal's physical pain or on a description of any spiritual significance due the hunted buffalo or any ceremony having to do with the hunt or the hunted, Standing Bear's emphasis is on confessing this embarrassing truth about the hunt and subsequently being proud for having told the truth to his father (see *My People* 64–65). According to Tinker, a Native American sense of balance demands reciprocity: "Violence cannot be perpetrated, a life taken, in a Native American society, without some spiritual act of reciprocation" (Tinker 160). Standing Bear, however, makes no mention of song, prayer, or offering of tobacco: "So I had killed

my first buffalo. When I examined the fallen animal and noted that I had shot five arrows into her, I felt that this was too many arrows for just one buffalo" (*My People* 64).

In *Land of the Spotted Eagle* Standing Bear's interest in and attention to all aspects of nonhuman nature and with human interaction with nature stand in stark contrast to those related in the first book. Concerning hunting, for example, he offers a much different perspective: "Killing for sport was unknown to the Lakota. His attitude toward living creatures would not permit him to slaughter. . . . All had a right to live and to increase" (*Land* 69). Such a statement blatantly contradicts the account of his rabbit hunting in *My People the Sioux*. According to his portrayal in *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, humans are in such close relationship with the land that he can even suggest that "to complain against the weather would be denying the praise offered to the Great Mystery" (*Land* 48). He insists on his people's close connection to every aspect of the natural world. Prefacing a description of the harsh, sparse, but beautiful landscape of the northern prairie, for example, he writes that "a description of the land partly, at least, describes the people." Thus, because of the power and severity of the climate on the northern prairies, the people, he argues, "grew used to strength, height, distance, power" (*Land* 42). In another place he writes that the "Lakotas believed that their bodies were nourished not only by food—but that wind, rain, and sun also nourished" (*Land* 46). Furthermore, it is in this later book that he informs his readers that for the Lakota, even the dances, like the people themselves, come "out of the soil" (*Land* 257). In other words, one might argue, according the Standing Bear, the land and *Homo sapiens* are so interconnected that humans actually take on the land's most significant and even intangible characteristics.

And, as mentioned above, it is also in this later book, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, that Standing Bear refers extensively to Mother Earth. Just as the interactions between human and earth are complex, the degree to which Standing Bear thought of the earth or Mother Earth as divine is no simple matter. At one point he writes that the "Indian loved to worship. From birth to death he revered his surroundings. He considered himself born in the luxurious lap of Mother Earth" (*Land* 256). At first glance, such a notion suggests that the earth can be seen as a sort of goddess, that the earth holds a special place in Lakota theology; a closer reading, however,

suggests that Standing Bear does not make explicit that he (or Lakotas in general) worship Mother Earth. Clearly enough, he (or Lakotas generally) loved to worship (with no grammatical object); he revered his surroundings (not necessarily limited to the land or a concept of Mother Earth); and he acknowledges his having been born from the earth, as it were. Still, Standing Bear makes no mention of explicitly worshiping a Mother Earth goddess. Especially in contrast to another point, in the context of the sun, when he argues that the Lakota did not worship that entity: "The Lakotas did not worship the sun, nor did they pray to it. They merely recognized the bearing it had upon all life, manifesting as it did the universal powers of the Great Mystery" (*Land* 46). By analogy, one could argue that he also recognized, without worshiping, the bearing Mother Earth had on all life.

As is thus readily apparent, Standing Bear incorporates a presentation of the concept of Mother Earth in the same book in which he, so to speak, turns against white America, and that presentation becomes a part of his case against the colonizers. In describing and using the notion of Mother Earth, Standing Bear moves significantly beyond the concept of a goddess or of something that the Lakota worship. He describes his serious, complex, and involved relationship with the land, only one part of which, it seems, is contained in or represented by the notion of the Mother Earth. Human beings come from the land, literally rising out of the soil, but the land includes the animals that are hunted, are respected, and are recipients of offerings in a reciprocal relationship. Even the climate (wind, rain, thunder, cold) is a part of the Lakota understanding of her- or himself. There are no easy lines to be drawn around what is and is not or does and does not constitute Mother Earth as Standing Bear refers to the concept. In this sense, then, there is a significant and fundamental difference between Standing Bear's reference to and use of Mother Earth for his political purposes and Sam Gill's claim that the origins of Mother Earth are a result of certain political and social exigencies, that the belief is merely a "crisis cult development" (Gill, *Mother* 63). The Lakota creation account connects the human and the earth, the first human emerges from the soil. This is not Standing Bear's invention (nor is it Eastman's). It is Lakota. Standing Bear uses the account passed to him to ground his thesis that (issues of nomenclature aside) the Lakota recognize the earth as the source of a very complex set of intricacies, and they thus recognize their continuing connection to that source, the earth.

I refer to specific differences between the two books in an effort to suggest a possible explanation for Standing Bear's use and extension of the concept of a Lakota as "a true naturist" in the second of the two books. The comparison forces a question: why would a Lakota notion of the human relation to nonhuman nature, which is apparently of such fundamental importance to the people, be essentially left out of a book entitled *My People the Sioux*—a book in which the author is evidently much more positive about assimilation and the opportunities afforded by the white world—and yet so prevalent in and central to the subsequent book, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*? A somewhat detailed look at some of Standing Bear's specific references to interactions with the land and nature might help explain the significance of the differences, suggesting the political and subversive nature of the latter book, especially perhaps when one appreciates that Standing Bear begins to emphasize stark contrasts between Sioux and European American attitudes toward the land.

In addition to acknowledging and insisting on a close tie between humans and the physical landscape, the soil, and the earth in *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, Standing Bear also writes of a "kinship with all creatures" as a "real and active principle." Humans and other animals, according to Standing Bear, "spoke a common tongue," and the animals had rights. The "Lakota never enslaved the animal" (*Land* 193), he insists. He asks rhetorical questions that suggest his belief in a fundamental difference in the different cultures' land ethics: "For who but the man indigenous to the soil could produce its song, story, and folk-tale; who but the man who loved the dust beneath his feet could shape it and put it into undying, ceramic form?" (*Land* 258). Standing Bear draws a distinction between Lakota or Native American interaction with the land and nonhuman animals and European or European American interaction, and unquestionably he privileges the indigenous people's relationship to the earth.

Standing Bear also makes distinctions between American Indians and European Americans concerning their different views of what constitutes the wild: "We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth, as 'wild.' Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the east came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices

upon us and the families we loved was it 'wild' for us" (*Land* 38). Standing Bear understands that what has come to be called the wilderness is the colonizers' trick. He writes that "for the Lakota there was no wilderness, since nature was not dangerous but hospitable" (*Land* 196). It is the European American who, according to Standing Bear, has engineered, through language, the concept of wilderness. Fifty-some years later, as noted above, Choctaw/Cherokee writer Louis Owens makes the same point about the notion of "wilderness" as a European American invention imposed on the landscape: "what I called 'wilderness' was an absurdity, nothing more than a figment of the European imagination. An 'absolute fake' " (Owens, *Mixedblood* 216). Inherent in the notion of land being wild is the notion of a human's distance or separation from it, a distance that Standing Bear does not acknowledge, further emphasizing the differences between the peoples and belief systems of the two cultures.

As Standing Bear points out the significant differences between Indian and non-Indian understanding of what wilderness might mean or be (if it exists at all), he at the same time articulates the ways in which Christian Europeans have co-opted heathen holy days and defined them on their own terms. He reminds his readers that "May-Day, Easter-Day," and other "celebrated days had their origin in 'heathen' festivals. Well, if found good and adopted, are they any less heathen for the adoption?" (*Land* 213–14). The passage clearly suggests the double irony that although the now Christian holy days have remained pagan, they are nevertheless recognized (by both Christian and heathen) as holy. Though Christians have claimed them as their own, and celebrated them as Christian, the days themselves, according to Standing Bear, are thus both heathen and holy. With such a rhetorical move, Standing Bear denigrates the holiness of the Christian (borrowed) holiday as he at the same time elevates the original heathen day. In a similar move, he calls into question the colonial privileging of one form of belief over another: "Why more heathen to give thanks under the blue sky than under the roof of a man-made place of worship?" (*Land* 213). He also suggests that origins do not matter nearly as much as do contemporary, viable understandings of the customs or beliefs that derive from those origins. Standing Bear invites the reader to appreciate Native American ceremony, writing that "there is a 'veil of mystery' that is supposed to hover over Indian ceremony. This veil is simply the failure

of the white mind to comprehend the Indian" (*Land* 214). The failure of comprehension, implies Standing Bear, is a fundamental reason for much of the misunderstandings between the two cultures.

There are failures of understanding, of course, when any two different cultures come together, but failure is augmented when there is an almost willful refusal to understand on the part of the colonizer. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, colonialism dismissed the "fact that indigenous societies had their own systems of order." According to the colonists, the indigenous people "were not fully human, they were not civilized enough to have systems, they were not literate, their languages and modes of thought were inadequate." As a result, "imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking" (Linda Smith 28). Part of Standing Bear's challenge, then, is to demonstrate to his European American readers that as an American Indian he does indeed have a history, does appreciate landscapes, does know viable social relations, and does enjoy sophisticated ways of thinking. In the 1933 introduction to *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, Melvin Gilmore seems to lament the great divide in understanding between the American Indians and the European Americans, and he makes the point that Standing Bear's book might help to bridge the gap in understanding: "now some representatives of the native American race are succeeding in some manner and degree in portraying the thought and feeling and the life of their people to the understanding of the alien race" (*Land* xxvi). Demystifying and clarifying such failures of comprehension on the part of the colonists is one of Standing Bear's stated purposes in writing the book:

> The inner life of the Indian is, of course, a closed book to the white man.
>
> So from the pages of this book I speak for the Lakota—the tribe of my birth. I have told of his outward life and tried to tell something of his inner life—ideals, religion, concepts of kindness and brotherhood; of laws of conduct and how we strove to arrive at arrangements of equity and justice. (*Land* xv)

For Standing Bear the elucidation of the inner life of the Lakota people, such as their concept of Mother Earth and their relationship with the natural world, becomes the perfect vehicle through which he can challenge and address the shortcomings and misunderstandings of the colonizer.

In this second book, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, then Standing Bear can be seen in part to condemn European American culture and to praise as somewhat pristine a Lakota culture of the past. One rhetorical strategy is his opting to define his own culture—specifically as it relates to the Lakotas' harmonious and respectful interaction with the land—in contradistinction to the culture of the West—specifically to its mistreatment and abuse of the land. After all, given Standing Bear's depiction, what could offer a starker contrast than to set the shortcomings of the ways European Americans exploit and mistreat nonhuman nature against what he describes as the Sioux's environmentally sound and spiritually respectful treatment of the land and animals? In his *American Mercury* article, which he had written upon returning to California after his brief and disheartening trip to South Dakota in 1931, Standing Bear declares that the "Indian fitted the broad plains and loved them just as did the buffalo; and those great grassy spaces, even today, are fit only for the raising of the four-footed beast" ("Tragedy" 274). Here he clearly points out the ethical, if not the practical, failure of European American efforts to plow and fence the prairie, and he defines a culture specifically as it relates to how the Lakotas interact with the land in contradistinction to the European Americans' impositions and exploitations. According to Hale, this *American Mercury* article "reflects its author's disillusionment with white life in the Los Angeles vicinity" (Hale 33). More to the point, perhaps, is that it reflects Standing Bear's disillusionment with the changes on the reservation brought about by colonization: "I found the destruction of my people continuing" ("Tragedy" 274), he writes, and his disappointment is reiterated in *Land of the Spotted Eagle*: "There was a great difference in the attitude taken by the Indian and the Caucasian toward nature, and this difference made of one a conservationist and of the other a non-conservationist of life." According to Standing Bear, the Indian "gave all creatures equal rights with himself" (*Land* 165). Standing Bear also insists that "the white mind does not feel toward nature as does the Indian mind, and it is, I believe, of the difference in childhood instruction." Put simply, argues Standing Bear, non-Indians are not taught an awareness of their surroundings: "There is about them no awareness, no acuteness, and it is this dullness that gives ugly mannerisms full play" (*Land* 195). According to Standing Bear, the "white man has come to be the symbol of the extinction for all things natural to this continent" (*Land*

166). Standing Bear's explicit and powerful condemnation comes at the end of a paragraph contrasting the two cultures and leaves little room for negotiation.

In one sense, Standing Bear can perhaps be seen as nostalgic as he offers examples of ways in which Lakota culture is (or was) more respectful of the land than European American culture. Indeed, that is one of the main ideas most readers seem to get from the book—the idea of the difference between the Indian and the non-Indian ways. Standing Bear's biographer Richard Ellis writes, for example, that according to Standing Bear "while Indians were natural conservationists, whites were not" (Ellis 152). In another sense, however, Standing Bear might also be seen to be making the argument that what was special or good about Lakota culture is indeed threatened or even lost in his present age. Much of what he has to say is conspicuously couched in a past tense that allows for little hope, little prospect of a turn to better times. He makes this grammatical suggestion explicit in the book's conclusion, as he contrasts the plural pronoun *we* in one clause with the *plow* in the next: "we can never again expect that beautiful rapport we once had with Nature. . . . the plow has changed the face of the world" (*Land* 257). These sentences not only infer a misunderstanding and a misuse of the land but they also suggest a damning indictment of European America's failure to understand Native American cultures.

With his reference to the plow, Standing Bear identifies specifically the failed and ultimately destructive attempts on the part of United States government agencies and government agents to make farmers of the Sioux. The concept of farming for a livelihood as imposed on the Lakotas despite the unsuitability of the land for farming, the extreme weather of the Dakotas, the lack of farm implements, and the relative lack of know-how on the part of the Native Americans, demonstrates one aspect of the failure of understanding. The effort to make farmers of the Lakotas is conjoined with the loss of the Indians' land base through allotment, which had been going on roughly since Standing Bear left the reservation as a young man. Between the passage of the General Allotment Act in 1887 and the year of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934, Native people in the United States lost more than two-thirds of their remaining land base. In reference to the Lakota specifically, Winona LaDuke writes that "the allotment process (the removal of Indians from their land) [as well as other factors] . . .

contributed significantly to the loss of self-sufficiency and self-esteem in these communities" (LaDuke 148–49). Standing Bear devotes much of the last chapter of *My People the Sioux* to describing his efforts to actually come into possession of his own allotment, to reclaim even a small part of the land of his ancestors, maintaining that the day he finally gets possession is the day he truly becomes free. There is a sad irony in the fact that allotment actually resulted in the loss of land for Native Americans and in the fact that "owning" the land in this sense is a Western idea rather than a Sioux attitude. In another sense, however, through reacquiring the land taken from his ancestors, Standing Bear is acting on his rights as an American as well as a Lakota man. He is in a sense vindicated. As he writes at the end of *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, the "American Indian is of the soil. . . . land and man [are] one" (247). He is reclaiming both what is his and what he is.

Although there might be some elements of nostalgia in Standing Bear's look back at Lakota culture, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* is nevertheless much more than merely a sentimental yearning for a particular past or a particular place. In the context of references to Mother Earth and to the notion of his people's respect for the land in the face of European American attitudes, a reading of *Land of the Spotted Eagle* helps address issues concerning the importance of place and of origins. That is, Standing Bear contributes to an ongoing discussion of cultural identity in the context of colonialism and Otherness. In Stuart Hall's language, in another context, Standing Bear can be seen to express the idea that "otherness as an inner compulsion changes our conception of 'cultural identity.' In this perspective, cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not once-and-for-all. It is not a mere phantasm either. It is something—not a mere trick of the imagination. It has its histories—and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects" (Hall 211). In the context of Standing Bear's two books, one can thus argue that for this Lakota author identity does not lie outside the history of colonial impositions on the people and the land, land that made up the very literal physical and spiritual center of Lakota existence. Until the European colonization of the people who lived on the northern prairies, before there was a European colonizer that is, the Lakotas did not have to distinguish themselves, they did not have to identify themselves, as different from the colonizer. The need came only with colonization.

Many of the exchanges between the colonizer (Gill's European settlers to whom he attributes the origins of the concept of Mother Earth, for example) and the colonized (in this instance the Lakota people whom Standing Bear describes) are too complex and too vibrant to allow for facile statements of origin. Yet as Standing Bear tells it, the Lakota people came from the soil, they literally rose out of the mud of Mother Earth. One cannot get closer to the earth than that; but despite their origins, those people could not have articulated a specifically *Western* conception of a Mother Earth goddess until there was contact and thus available to them a *Western* definition or a *Western* formulation of Mother Earth, a formulation that attempted to interpret, qualify, and define the Lakota belief system. Whether or not the expression itself came later, the specific Lakota relationships to the earth as articulated by Standing Bear predate contact, and the practices and articulations of that relationship exist in Lakota history. The belief system, as Standing Bear articulates it, is always in flux, always changing, mutating, incorporating foreign elements, always evolving, always beginning again. In Stuart Hall's language, the "past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past,' since our relation to it, like a child's relation to the mother, is always-already 'after the break'" (Hall 211). In this sense Standing Bear can be seen to use the word *naturist*, for example, to suggest the difference between the Lakota and the European American, who—as Standing Bear maintains—lacks the naturist's relationship with the earth. Making and articulating that distinction is necessary, however, only "after the break," only after contact.

If *Land of the Spotted Eagle* is indeed a more polemical, a more politically defiant book than *My People the Sioux*, and if one of the polemical aspects is the distinction Standing Bear draws between Lakotas and European Americans in relationship to the land, then perhaps Standing Bear can indeed be said to use the Mother Earth concept as a tool in challenging the imposition of the colonists' culture on the Lakota people. In other words, one can argue that Standing Bear uses the concept of Mother Earth or of Lakota as a "naturist" to establish a tribal identity that is clearly and importantly distinguishable from the colonizer's identity. Standing Bear emphasizes the Lakotas' reverence for nature and insists that it is an integral aspect of Lakota culture; he thus maintains that it differentiates the Native American from the European American. He puts forward that attribute, in a sense, to essentialize and thereby endorse or valorize the Lakotas in some mean-

ingful and differentiating way. In Gayatri Spivak's terms, readers can thus acknowledge that Standing Bear turns to a sort of "strategic essentialism" as a means of combating the dominant culture and also as a means of reenvisioning history, a means of deconstructing historiography. According to Spivak, "the project to retrieve the subaltern consciousness [can be read] as the attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis." In this sense, then, through such essentializing Standing Bear is able to call into question mainstream historical accounts and explanations of cause and effect. He is able—to borrow again from Spivak's language—to make "strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak 205). According to Akeel Bigrami, "subjective identities often are a result of endorsement by agents of the facts that make for their objective identities, endorsements, which therefore transform those facts into value commitments. Thus someone who belongs to a certain race by descent . . . may make his racial identity subjective by endorsing this fact about himself, in other words, by valuing the fact that he belongs to that race, and so making it into a value commitment" (Bigrami 183). Standing Bear, in this sense, identifies, even essentializes, and certainly valorizes Lakotas as naturists to differentiate them from what he sees as a demeaning and demeaned European American people. He emphasizes his "racial" difference—as evident in reverence for Mother Earth—as a value endorsement and thus as a political strategy. Seen in this light, one can appreciate the importance of Standing Bear's emphasis on the centrality of the specifically Lakota connection with the land throughout *Land of the Spotted Eagle.*

To argue that Standing Bear presents the Lakotas as essentially naturists, as people who honor Mother Earth, is not to argue that he invents or borrows what is not (or was not originally) an integral part of Lakota culture. Rather it is to suggest that he looks to a philosophy that he sees as most essentially, or fundamentally, Lakota. The creation story of man emerging from the soil obviously predates contact, for example. Standing Bear articulates the Lakota as "naturist" strategically, and this strategic essentialism is especially significant in Standing Bear's case because it allows him to articulate and acknowledge a respect for the land. And colonization is all about the land: taking and controlling the land. If issues of land acquisition on the part of the European Americans are at the heart of colonization, and part of the colonists' argument or ad hoc rationalization is that Indians do

not "use" the land, or improve the land, then it is strategic on Standing Bear's part at several levels to insist that Native Americans do respect or even revere the land in ways European Americans do not, and moreover in ways European Americans cannot even comprehend.

Standing Bear refers to the plow as having "changed the face of the world" (*Land* 257) at the very beginning of what has come to be called the Dust Bowl years. In 1932, the year before the publication of *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, the dust storms began. Just two years later, an estimated fifty million acres of farmlands had lost their topsoil. Although the storms were worse on the Southern Plains, they affected the Northern Plains as well. In November of 1933, a severe dust storm swept through South Dakota, for example, depositing soil "as far east as Lake Superior" (Hurt 34). Although the Great Plains has always been subject to drought and dust storms, the new agricultural technology of the twentieth century, embodied in the plow, made the storms of the 1930s the worst ever (see Hurt 15). The turning up of the prairie sod for farming, the replacement of the buffalo with domestic cattle, and then the severe drought of the 1930s resulted in environmental disaster. Standing Bear seems almost to prophesy the devastation to come: "We cannot have back the days of the buffalo and beaver; we cannot win back our clean blood-stream and superb health, and we can never again expect that beautiful *rapport* we once had with Nature. The springs and lakes have dried and the mountains are bare of forests. The plow has changed the face of the world" (*Land* 247).

Standing Bear looks back at nineteenth-century Lakota culture and draws a somewhat idyllic picture of land and people, but his depiction is only apparently nostalgic. It is rather his suggestion that that particular "time is all but done" (*Land* 257). The time is nearly lost, yes, but his recounting of it is also his very political attempt to recreate, if not recapture, that past as a sort of mirror reflecting the devastation wrought by the plow and the axe. Standing Bear thus challenges and confronts the colonizer, especially in the context of the land. As he makes abundantly clear, white American environmental practices have been disastrous and assimilation policies have failed. At the same time, however, American culture and allotment policies have been unable to destroy Lakota people and culture. If Standing Bear can articulate and thus claim a Mother Earth concept as a part of his past and as a part of Lakota identity as he recaptures it

and articulates it, the relationship to nature and the land that the concept suggests lives and continues to evolve; he can bring it back, revive it, as it were, and thus gain a sort of power over the colonizer. Through this reversal he gains and offers the Sioux as a people and as a culture the power to resist and to survive.

> The fact that I had lived to see the end of a period in this progression when the exploitation of natural resources of a continent had reached a saturation point, under the berserk methods of economically, socially, and politically liberated Europeans called Americans, was very interesting.
>
> – *John Joseph Mathews,* Talking to the Moon

CHAPTER FOUR

Talking Back

John Joseph Mathews and Talking to the Moon

After his return to Los Angeles from South Dakota in 1931, Luther Standing Bear quickly wrote an essay for the magazine *American Mercury* and evidently then turned immediately to writing his book *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933). At roughly the same time, Osage writer John Joseph Mathews returned from Los Angeles to his former home on the Osage Reservation in Oklahoma. He had been "involved with a real estate business" (Wilson, "Osage" 272), but he returned to Pawhuska in 1929, and in 1932 he had his cabin built on the ridges. Born in 1896, Mathews is essentially a generation younger than Standing Bear, but they share similar backgrounds, in a way, and they both became established writers in the 1930s. Mathews authored a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection, *Wah'Kon-Tah* (1932), the novel *Sundown* (1934), and almost three decades later, a tribal history, *The Osages* (1961); each book deals with the history and culture of the Osages. Like Standing Bear, Mathews experienced reservation life, went away to school, traveled through Europe, and lived in southern California before returning to his homeland. Mathews, one-eighth Osage himself, was raised at the Osage Agency in Pawhuska, Oklahoma; after schooling at the University of Oklahoma (B.S. in 1920) and Oxford University (receiving a B.A. in natural science in 1923), and after residing in

Geneva, Switzerland, and then Los Angeles, California, he returned to Pawhuska, where he built a stone cabin and lived throughout the 1930s.

Both Standing Bear and Mathews have been identified as assimilationists, yet the extent to which this designation applies or how assimilationist beliefs influenced their writings can be argued. In a discussion of the novel *Sundown*, Louis Owens argues that Mathews "may be in fact the most acculturated of all Indian novelists" (*Other* 50). In another reading of the same novel, Christopher Schedler suggests Mathews turns from a strictly assimilationist attitude, arguing that the author questions "received traditions" and instead "experiments with new ways of representing a modern identity" (Schedler 128). As I suggest in the previous chapter, Standing Bear demonstrates an apparent change in attitude between his first and second major books, especially after his visit in 1931 to the reservation of his youth. In this chapter I argue that Mathews too can be seen to vacillate between advocating assimilation and condemning the effects of European American culture on his people. As we have seen, Standing Bear also asserts that he had failed in his effort to assimilate: "I had tried to live a peaceful and happy life, tried to adapt myself and make readjustments to fit the white man's mode of existence. But I was unsuccessful" ("Tragedy" 273). Similarly, early in *Talking to the Moon*, Mathews suggests his ambivalence toward assimilation, commenting that he "had wasted some of the best years of [his] life . . . trying to make more comfortable the assimilation of the Osage Indian" (*Talking* 13–14). It is thus evident that for both writers, assimilation remained a problematical issue.

As does Standing Bear, Mathews emphasizes his relationship with the natural world; Mathews is especially interested in the balance of nature on the ridges where he builds his sandstone house. LaVonne Ruoff argues that, like Henry David Thoreau and John Muir, Mathews "withdrew from cities to overcome the separation he felt between himself and nature" (Ruoff, "John" 8). When he gets back from his life away from Osage County, Oklahoma—after his service as a pilot in the First World War, his schooling in both Oklahoma and England, his other extended travel abroad (especially in Switzerland and North Africa), and his stint living in Los Angeles—he notes in *Talking to the Moon* (1945) that he had "lived to see the end of a period in this progression when the exploitation of natural resources of a continent had reached a saturation point, under the berserk methods of

economically, socially, and politically liberated Europeans called Americans" (*Talking* 15). Nor were the changes that Mathews experienced limited to the world far away from his home on the Osage Reservation in northeastern Oklahoma. As Robert Warrior points out in *Tribal Secrets*, his study of Mathews and Vine Deloria Jr., when Mathews returned to the blackjacks, to the Oklahoma of his boyhood, "Osage traditional life and the landscape itself had changed considerably. Many animal species had disappeared, and the complex social and ceremonial system in place just forty years before was all but completely supplanted" (Warrior 57–58). It is perhaps in view of such changes that Mathews formulates his account of the ten years he spends living on the ridges: "There is an accounting to nature which must be made by those who leave the herd or the pack to run alone without responsibility to the pack or the herd" (*Talking* 12). It is through this account of nature, I argue, that Mathews shapes his autobiography and creates a book that is at one and the same time an assimilationist tract and a medium of protest against the very culture the narrator seems to be courting.

Mathews, like Standing Bear in a sense, incorporates an idea of the centrality of nature and the natural world and his own relationship to that natural world as an index to measure the extent to which protest is indeed necessary. As for Standing Bear, for Mathews the natural world and a person's relationship to it becomes a trope for the failure of European American culture. This is not to say, however, that in either the autobiography *Talking to the Moon* or the novel *Sundown* Mathews endorses a nature-loving Indian stereotype. Louis Owens insists that he does not adopt a "romantic posture toward American Indian existence . . . celebrated by the non-Indian world." Concerning the protagonist in *Sundown*, according to Owens, "Mathews goes beyond such a stock response, making of Chal's story a more complex narrative of cultural survival" (Owens, *Other* 53). *Talking to the Moon* is also a narrative of survival, and in this sense both books, novel and autobiography, are works of protest. Jennifer Gillan points out the very political nature of *Sundown* in her essay on federal policy and American Indian fiction: the novel attests "to the fact that the Allotment Act took away tribal sovereignty and substituted a watered-down form of individual power as expressed through the amassing of consumer goods" (Gillan 5). In his critical assessment of Mathews

and Deloria, Robert Warrior sees protest in Mathews's book and maintains that Mathews resists "the forces of death around him. . . . His voice of protest is not the one that makes loud demands," however. Rather, by his withdrawal, Mathews moves "toward the maturity of intellectual experience and action" (Warrior 104). Warrior finds Mathews's autobiography a cryptic critique of the author's European American contemporaries.

One can ask whether it is fair to suggest that *Talking to the Moon*, this "spiritual autobiography of a special period in the history of the author's life" as LaVonne Ruoff calls it ("John" 5), can also be deemed protest literature, especially considering that the narrator himself insists he "could never be disturbed by the struggle of social groups in America who waved ideological banners" (*Talking* 15). And yet, he describes watching his house being built in *Talking to the Moon* and presents his ambivalence about the notion of protest: "I had a vague feeling that there ought to be some protest to the building of the house in this corner of the ranch that had been unmolested for as long as I could remember" (*Talking* 11). And protest he does. Mathews's protest takes the form of an account of human interaction with the landscape. Through his acknowledged failure despite his great insistence on maintaining a balance of nature on the ridges, Mathews offers himself as an example of a European American worthy of critique and blame.

Characterizing himself as a settler on the ridges, the narrator and subject of the autobiography becomes an embodiment of the progress of "civilization" across America and onto the land of the Osages. He notes his involvement with mainstream Western culture early in his account: "I wasn't running away from anything and was certainly not vindictive. I had been comfortable and had access to all the mechanical comforts and had appreciated them deeply" (*Talking* 14). Despite protestations to the contrary, the narrator may well be unreliable however. Not even the best-intentioned autobiographer can recreate the subject as it was; rather, that autobiographer must construct the subject (the self) from memory. According to recent theory of autobiography, one can establish that there is a distance, a separation of identities, between the narrator and his subject (the author himself). Theorist Paul John Eakin writes that "autobiographical truth is not fixed but an evolving context in an intricate process of self-discovery and self creation" (Eakin 3). According to Philippe Lejeune, the failure to make a distinction between the *I* of the narrator and the *subject* of the narra-

tion "causes the greatest confusion in the problemantic of autobiography" (Lejeune 9). According to Susan Kalter, Mathews as author strategically blurs any clear distinctions in just this sense. In his historical novel, she maintains, "Mathews constructs the narrative consciousness of *Wah'Kon-Tah* in such a way as to admit multiple and opposing perspectives and, in fact, to oust himself, the author, from a position of knowing authority. Throughout the novel, in fact, at least three distinct narrative consciousnesses are present: the authorial, the apparent protagonist (Miles), and the alternate protagonist (the tribe in its collective authority)" (Kalter 27). In this sense, a narrator creates a sort of narrative distance, establishing a detachment, or a recognition on some level that historical reality differs from an apparent reality, the one created by the narrator of the autobiography, yet the apparent reality is all that is left us since we can get at history only through the recreations and various interpretations.

Acknowledging a distinction, or narrative distance, between the actual man, John Joseph Mathews, and the subject of the autobiography allays confusion, yet it also creates the potential for identifying a distance between the narrator and his subject, between the reconstructed narrator of the autobiography and the actual historical figure. That is, the author (Mathews as Osage, as historical person) and the reader can perceive a clash between their own sense of history and the narrator's account of that history. The narrator claims, for example, that he lives in harmony with nature as he extols the virtues of hunting, yet at the same time the text itself, through the many accounts the narrator offers, insists that the disruption of the balance of nature and the practice of sport-hunting cause long-term ill effects on the landscape around Pawhuska and the blackjacks and on Osage culture as well.

The distinction between the historical figure and the autobiographical recreation of that historical figure enables Mathews to make manifest his protest perhaps most poignantly in two specific contexts. First, the narrator describes his coming to live in the blackjacks, promising to maintain the balance of nature, at the same time that he disrupts that balance at virtually every turn: through the building of the house on the ridge, through the introduction of domestic animals, and through the settler-narrator's sport-hunting practices. In short, the narrator plays the part of settler in a book that decries the adverse results of settlement. Second, the autobiography

capitalizes on a distance between the narrator and the historical Mathews during the ten years described in the autobiographical account. That is, the autobiographical text deemphasizes the Osage heritage of the historical Mathews and his historical involvement in Osage politics and tribal affairs during the 1930s. Such a deemphasis belies the "actual" historical figure, the man who lived outside the account the narrator offers in the autobiography. In the context of such a discrepancy between the historical Mathews and the narrator's self-depiction, the autobiography takes on a function beyond merely relating a life; through its distancing of author from narrator, it assumes the role of social critique. My contention is that through the distancing between author and narrator, especially in depictions of the narrator's relationship with the land, the book constitutes protest literature. That is, by exposing the complex and paradoxical life of the settler on the ridge, Mathews creates a narrator who forcefully demonstrates the problems that the Osage face in attempting to retain cultural distinctions and survive culturally despite the machinations of the dominant culture represented by that settler.

Although the autobiography presents the life of a settler, Mathews's Osage heritage does inform certain aspects of the text. Louis Owens suggests Steinbeck's *Sea of Cortez* (1941) as a model for *Talking to the Moon* ("Disturbed" 168–69), yet he does agree with LaVonne Ruoff who demonstrates that the purpose, structure, and content of the book are informed not only by Mathews's familiarity with Western writers Thoreau and Muir but also by Osage tradition and belief. Underlying the book's structure, argues Ruoff, is the incorporation of the Osage concept of duality that consists of thought or imagination, what Mathews and the Osages call Chesho for thought or imagination, and Hunkah, war or physical action. According to Mathews, the "Osage, while in perfect harmony [with the balance of the earth], assumed that he had two natures." The Osage, continues Mathews, "thought of his tribe as symbolical of the universe, and he divided himself and his universe into two parts, man and animal, spiritual and material, sky and earth, which he called Chesho for the Sky People and Hunkah for the Earth People, because he felt this duality" (*Talking* 221). As LaVonne Ruoff points out, "this division of the Osage into Chesho (associated with peace and thought or imagination) and Hunkah (associated with war and physical action) influences Mathews's attitudes toward his

own state of mind, which moves between these polarities" (Ruoff, "John" 18). It is this distinction between two aspects of human nature or of nature in general (Father Sun, Mother Earth or female moon, for example) that nonetheless constitutes a distinction, a distinction that is the "key to oneness with nature" (Ruoff, "John" 16). Robert Warrior also notes the Osage connection, calling the book "an interpretation of the ecological and social history of the Osage land and people" (Warrior 58). According to Guy Logsdon, Mathews maintains that Osage "religious concepts are intertwined with nature through three principles of life: 'self preservation, the necessity of reproduction, and a Force that inspires a bird to sing for the sheer joy of singing' " (Logsdon 74). In this sense, the distancing of himself from his own Osage heritage, Mathews either expresses or implies the importance of nature in different dimensions of Osage culture throughout the autobiographical account.

Despite the Osage connections and Mathews's actual interest in preserving Osage heritage and tradition, he omits from *Talking to the Moon* his own part in Osage history of the 1930s. As Ruoff argues, part of the reason for this omission may well be that "Mathews realized that exploring his own ethnicity in this autobiography would have resulted in severe criticism from the Osages and would have undercut his efforts on their behalf" (Ruoff, "John" 15). The narrator does indeed assiduously avoid exploring or even identifying his own Osage heritage. Perhaps this silence about his heritage enables him to make manifest his understanding of a distinction between European American and Native American culture as he traces the progress of civilization unhindered by his Osage heritage. Having grown up at the Agency, the historical Mathews was acutely aware of and involved in Osage history and contemporary concerns. He knew, for example, that in 1871, twenty-three years before he was born, the Osages were forced to move from their reservation in Kansas, which in 1808 had been promised in perpetuity. In 1808 the Osages were forced to cede almost all of present day Missouri and almost all lands north of the Arkansas River in present day Arkansas. Seventeen years later, in 1825, they were forced "[t]o cede all remaining lands lying within the state of Missouri and Territory of Arkansas and all lands north of the Arkansas River in present-day Kansas." In other words, the Osage tribe was asked in these two treaties to cede about one hundred million acres (see Mathews, *The Osages* 518 ff,b

and Wilson, *Underground* 8–9). By 1825, the Little Ones, as Mathews calls the Osage people, were thus left with a relatively narrow strip of land in present-day Kansas 50 miles wide and about 250 miles long, from 25 miles west of the Kansas-Missouri border (neutral land) to the Mexican territory, land promised to them for as long as they chose to live on it.

Mathews knew that from Kansas the Osages then removed to Indian Territory, Oklahoma, where they bought land and settled in what became Osage County. He knew that the Osages had fought off allotment until 1906 and that despite eventual allotment they did manage to retain mineral rights on their lands. As a beneficiary himself, Mathews knew that when oil was discovered, many Osage individuals and families had become rich during the boom of the 1920s. He knew too well that this wealth invited exploitation from the outside. He knew, and points out in his book *The Osages*, that for the tribal members allotment was unique in that they "would hold their land intact but not communally" (*Osages* 773). Even before allotment, the Osages had money to buy their reservation in Indian Territory from the Cherokees; and before oil money they had money from leasing for cattle grazing. Mathews recalls this final move from Kansas to Oklahoma (in subtle protest) by narrating a story told by Eagle-That-Gets-What-He-Wants. In the story the Osage chief's father relates what the headmen of the Little Osage think: " 'they say that what Government said to us is not true. They say there that what Government said to us about having our own land if we left Kansas is not true. I heard them say there that white men are coming here too. They will come like flood water on river; they will run over everything' " (*Talking* 92).

Despite Mathews's extensive knowledge of Osage history and his awareness of the insidious exploitation, political conniving, and racist and illegal actions against the Osages, very little comment shows up (directly at least) in *Talking to the Moon.* In only two specific instances does the author recall his "attending to the business of the Osage," and even then he only says that this work took him occasionally from the blackjacks. He describes neither the work he did nor the issues themselves (see *Talking* 125, 212–13). The autobiography thus appears surprisingly apolitical for having been written by someone who was an extremely active member of the Osage Council from 1934–1942, a man who traveled often to Washington, D.C., on behalf of the Osages, and who was actively involved in acquiring ma-

terials for the Osage museum (whose creation he spearheaded). Mathews had just written *Wah'Kon-Tah* (1932), an extremely successful (Book-of-the-Month Club selection) fictional history of the Osages in the nineteenth century; while living in his blackjacks cabin he wrote *Sundown* (1934), an Indian-centered, semiautobiographical novel; and during the 1930s he was an outspoken advocate of John Collier's Indian reform proposals. This active and involved Mathews, however, is left almost entirely out of the autobiographical *Talking to the Moon.*

Also left out of the account is any description of the corrupt world Mathews enters when he returns to Pawhuska. The oil boom of the 1920s had died down substantially with depressed oil prices, but the exploitation of the remaining wealthy Osage people continued through the 1930s. Mathews cites 1932 as the date the "great frenzy" ended, but he knew that the exploitation of the people did not stop then. As late as 1936 Mathews could have read an article about the Osages as the richest Indians in the world. According to one writer, in the popular *Literary Digest*, for example, the Osages were 1) getting ever richer, 2) complaining anyway about not receiving their full shares of the oil money because the oil companies were cheating them out of three percent, and 3) enjoying a "prosperity such as not even their white neighbors had heard of." They enjoyed the prosperity, the author claims, even though they did not really know how to appreciate such wealth—spending it, for example, on lavish homes they would not live in ("Richest Indians" 14). The racism evident in this account and the exploitation of Osage people continued after the actual boom ended. As Terry Wilson records, the sale of both bootlegged and legal alcohol remained prevalent. Use of addictive narcotics, especially morphine, was widespread, much of it prescribed to Indians by non-Indian doctors. Using a bail-bond scam, non-Indian bondsmen swindled Osage people accused of crimes. Legal graft continued as the non-Indian lawyers created lawsuits to force Osage people to pay fees to avoid going to court. These lawyers could represent two opposing parties in the same lawsuit, collecting fees from both. And a disproportionate number of thefts were committed against Osage people (Wilson, *Underground* 158). Well aware of this crime and exploitation, the historical Mathews spoke out in 1935, saying that "the Osage people . . . became industry, and flocking to them from all ends of the earth came every type of person, rats as well as fairly decent

citizens. . . . If the . . . payments were stopped tomorrow there would be nothing here in six months, there would be coyotes howling in the streets" (qtd. in Wilson, *Underground* 155). No reference to such exploitation or to Mathews's opinion about it, however, appears in the autobiography.

In response to the fact that Oklahoma Indians were essentially left out of the major New Deal policies of the 1930s, the historical Mathews accused politicians and journalists of being biased against the Osage people in their accounts concerning their interest in the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). He blamed "self-interested whites," especially "that group that have always lived off the Indian" (qtd. in Wilson, *Underground* 166). In an interview with Guy Logsdon, Mathews offers a reason for his returning to live in Osage County. He recalls that on a hunting trip in North Africa he was reminded of his youth by a group of "wild" Kabyles who surrounded his camp "joy shooting." "So I got homesick, and I thought, what am I doing over here? Why don't I go back and take some interest in my people? Why not go back to the Osage? They've got a culture. So, I came back; then I started talking with the old men" (Logsdon 71). Despite his later explanation of a reason for returning, and despite his intense political activity and outspokenness while he was there, the narrator of the autobiography is silent on that and on many other similar political issues. In a sense—insofar as any such generalization is valid—one can argue that the silence exemplifies how *Talking to the Moon* is characteristic of Native American autobiography. As Kathleen Mullen Sands suggests, for instance, American Indian autobiography "tends to be retrospective rather than introspective. . . . There is little self-indulgence on the part of Indian narrators" (Sands 61). In addition, as this silence makes clear, the narrator selects and omits facts to the particular end of relaying a particular coherent and patterned life for a particular purpose.

Rather than an Osage man who returned to spend much of his time and energy working to preserve Osage tradition, interview elders, establish an Osage museum, and take notes for an eventual book on the Osages, the narrator of the autobiography instead presents himself as a settler who builds his house, introduces domestic animals, and hunts animals for sport, some to near extinction, while contending that he has returned to the blackjacks to climb "out of the roaring stream of civilization" (*Talking* 11). The narrator is not totally unaware that in attempting to climb out of

civilization, he inevitably brings some of the worst of that civilization to the blackjacks with him. But even before he brings in domestic animals, the introduction of which breaks the truce between the narrator himself and the other animals on the ridge, he acknowledges that he disrupts the balance. His first disruptive act is to drill a well. In this instance, he seems oddly oblivious to any disruption caused by the drilling despite his awareness of a well's adverse effects on the landscape and despite the distinct similarities between drilling for water and drilling for oil. In emphasizing how drilling for oil desecrates Osage land, Mathews describes the spots "where holes were sunk for oil," and he notes that "[s]ome of these spots have been barren of vegetation for twenty-five years." An old boiler, he writes, "was like a wart on the prairie" (*Talking* 189). The reader thus discovers an ironic, a complex, even a contradictory, situation. Although not mentioned in the text, oil money enables the historical Mathews to build the very house he lives in, and it provides him the freedom to write and hunt. As Terry Wilson argues, "Osage oil production freed Mathews from seeking gainful employment" (Wilson, "Osage" 271). Mathews does not actively participate in the oil drilling, but he does reap its rewards, and he drives his station wagon across the valley, without commenting that he consumes the gas and oil that the wells littering the landscape pump for him. And he does drill for water.

The similarities between the two types of drilling suggest a parallel between homesteading and the adverse impact of the homesteader's oil enterprise. In addition, in this particular instance, the drilling for water also implies the desecration of a grave. Mathews finds the bleached bones of a horse from his boyhood: "I picked up two of the leg bones and examined them. . . . I dismounted and laid them one across the other." Later, this bone cross (by chance) marks the site of the well; thus, the drilling for water, symbolically, if inadvertently, desecrates a grave even before the building of the house whose "composition roof" remains "an alien" (*Talking* 17). Despite this inadvertent desecration, the narrator insists that he returned to the blackjacks "to become a part of the balance" (*Talking* 2). He even makes his house out of area sandstone so that it would be an integral part of its environment: "The house with its stone colored by nature was nature's own, and, to bear out the impression, a coyote came trotting across the ridge without even looking up from his hunting" (*Talking* 17).

An early encounter with a skunk in the house further suggests the initial harmonious relationship of man and wild animal on the ridges. The skunk walked into the house through an open door while Mathews sat reading. *Mephitis mephitis* and *Homo sapiens* simply stared at each other: "Assured that I was harmless, he went into the kitchen. . . . He stayed so long that I continued reading for some time, then I heard his claws ticking against the cement, and he passed on out into the yard. I got up and closed the door" (*Talking* 59). The incident suggests the early communal relationship between the settler and the wildlife on the ridge.

Such peaceful encounters and the narrator's good intentions aside, however, the settler soon breaks his truce with his nonhuman neighbors: "with all my plans to become a part of the balance of nature on the ridges, I brought conflict, after the period of a year" (*Talking* 60). By harboring nonnative animals, he takes on responsibility and invites struggle, rationalizing that he is not part of the balance anyway. A subsequent encounter with another skunk demonstrates how disrupted that balance has become. This time a skunk finds and destroys the mother and some chicks of a "fighting bird" Mathews had imported from England. When the chicken farmer sees the skunk asleep among its victims, he retaliates: "I was so annoyed that I held the muzzle of my Smith & Wesson to his head and emptied the cylinder, glorying in the nauseating musk odor that hung on the heavy air of night, transforming its glory with the sharp explosions that broke the silence of the ridge into a symbol of the mighty power of *Homo sapiens* when aroused and announcing his entrance into the struggle." Disregarding his own action that seems as brutal as the skunk's yet somehow more sinister because it is motivated by anger and desire for revenge, the human claims that the skunk is the abnormal one. He writes that the skunk "need not have been the indolent victim of my wrath, but he let his lust, that had nothing whatever to do with his necessity to survive, lead into excessive killing and urge him to remain abnormally with his victims" (*Talking* 65). Even though Mathews admits that the introduction of nonnative species had "broken the truce with predators," and caused the skunk to behave "abnormally," he concludes this episode by describing his own complicity in the skunk's "abnormal" behavior: "I felt that I had to assume some responsibility, that my interference brought tragedy into my woven-wire inclosure" (*Talking* 66). By arguing that his response and behavior are nat-

ural, Mathews rationalizes his disruption of the balance: "Man is under the same natural urges as the other species of the earth. He mates, he fears, he struggles to survive, and he expresses himself in song and in play; he goes even further and acknowledges the progression of life through his dream of God. . . . Perhaps it is the primal urge to protect his mate and young diverted into other channels when mate and young are lacking or not in primal need to his protection" (*Talking* 60). In this way, Mathews is able to rationalize his killing of the skunk and account for his violence and anger, but he makes no effort to differentiate himself from the colonizer who makes legitimate any and all actions related to protecting the colony.

One might argue that the enormity of the narrator's action is not his killing of what he calls an "abnormal" skunk in a fit of rage; the enormity is in his "emptying the cylinder," in relishing in the "musk odor," in championing the human being in the struggle for survival, and in attempting to justify and rationalize the action. This scene of killing the skunk differs substantially and interestingly from one much later in the book when the narrator again describes his troubles with the imported H-D (hundred-dollar) chickens. Recounting another incident with his chickens in the "Baby-Bear Moon" (December) chapter, he deems the coyotes "sportive" when they kill his chickens: "They found easy killing and had some sport. I couldn't credit them with vengeance, nor with murder, for that matter, since they hadn't killed members of their own tribe. Their emotions must have been intense and their excitement wild" (*Talking* 204). Mathews's relatively calm and empathetic response to this particular attack on his prized chickens can perhaps be explained in that it comes in the midst of several accounts of his own sportive nature and the excitement he gets from his own hunting.

Thus the somewhat paradoxical duality: the settler, turned farmer, finds himself both pained by the tragedy he introduces and excited by the power a gun gives him. Like the European American settler, he argues not only that he belongs on the ridges but—ironically—that he "remained a part of the balance through [his] strength to protect [his] flocks." He claims that by breaking his truce with nature he "achieved a greater harmony with [the] environment." At the same time, however, he discards his dream of balance: "there is no place for dreams in natural progression," he confesses (*Talking* 60). This rhetoric of rationalization echoes the European settlers' own arguments for clear-cutting forests, for depleting particular game (and

nongame) species, and for Manifest Destiny regardless of what flora, nonhuman animals, or peoples might stand in the way.

Mathews makes manifest the paradoxical nature of such easy rationalization through his description of an incident with a blacksnake. Discovering the snake with half its body inside a birdhouse he had built, he identifies an enemy and decides to protect his avian wards: "I had to shoot holes through the box with the 22-caliber rifle to kill the snake and, in so doing, killed the nestlings. . . . My feeling of tragedy is keen at such times," he writes, "but there is certainly compensation to the hunter when the long, black body relaxes his hold and falls like a piece of rope to the ground, and the hunter can count the hits which were effective" (*Talking* 66–67). Now become protector, the narrator has introduced not only conflict into his garden, but paradox as well: he kills the nestlings to kill the snake to keep it from killing the nestlings. He disregards the fact that, like skunks and coyotes, the snake merely behaves naturally in an act that has nothing to do with the farmer personally, nor his domestic animals, nor his diet, nor his survival. But in acting naturally in the unnatural environment the narrator has created, the snake becomes the unnatural one just as the skunk had become the abnormal one.

The blacksnake episode seems to demonstrate the distance between the settler-narrator and the balance he had hoped to maintain. Another indication of such a distance is apparent in Mathews's accounts of hunting for sport set in juxtaposition to his account of the fate of the American bison. Accounts of both his own hunting and of bison extinction in Oklahoma vividly demonstrate the irony evident in the disruption of the balance. The narrator kills for food, for protection, and for sport and considers hunting a human contribution to the balance of nature; he argues that hunting is not inconsistent with his philosophy of balance. But the hunting he does is not for survival, and it clearly further disrupts the balance of nature as the narrator himself points out. Mathews himself complicates the issue, that is, in that he laments the passing of individual animals and of species, which are the very animals he hunts. He especially decries the European American hunter's practices even though he himself is an active sportsman. The settler is a hunter who struggles with and ultimately fails to maintain the balance of nature on the ridges.

The historical Mathews, in contrast to the narrator, though also an avid

hunter, is at the same time the protector and preserver of Osage tradition. The June chapter, "Buffalo-Pawing-Earth Moon," begins with this sentence: "The buffalo are gone from the blackjacks and from the head waters of the Cimarron River, where the Osages once hunted them." Mathews continues: "they have been displaced by the white-faced bulls" (*Talking* 75). This simple statement recalls the historical importance of the buffalo to the Osage people as it juxtaposes bison and range cattle. Fully aware of the bison's historical importance to Osage culture, Mathews devotes the "Buffalo-Pawing-Earth Moon" chapter in large measure to describing individual Osage people and recounting Osage traditions. He associates this buffalo month "with the religious and other ceremonies of the Osage" (*Talking* 77), implying a connection between the near extinction of the bison and the near passing and disappearance of Osage culture. He describes the Osage people as being "part of the balance of my blackjacks and prairie" (*Talking* 86), and he thus connects the natural balance with cultural balance. Through the example of dancing, Mathews maintains that tradition is the vehicle through which the Osages retain their dignity: "Self-esteem comes to the man pre-eminent again when he can give expensive presents on the fourth day of the dances, and a heroic tribal or gentile memory comes when his song is sung" (*Osages* 783). In *Talking to the Moon*, Mathews writes that "in its dignity and fervency the dance is still a prayer" (*Talking* 83). Nevertheless, he sees reason to lament: disruption of the balance has endangered tradition and tribal memory. Eagle-That-Gets-What-He-Wants worries, for example, because he "knows that his passing, and the passing of the other older men of the tribe, will be the symbolic passing of the tribe insofar as the old order is concerned. He feels that he will be cheated of that very precious immortality which is the tribal memory" (*Talking* 89). To allay his fears, the narrator records the old chief's life and thereby preserves the culture it represents.

Osage religion, too, is a part of a delicate cultural balance: "Their religion, their concept of God, came out of my blackjacks, out of the fears inspired by the elements, and it was colored just as the animals were colored for perfect adjustment" (*Talking* 77). But just as settlers disrupted the balance by bringing in nonnative species, Mathews suggests that "Christianity and mechanism" threw Osage religion into "wild confusion." He links Osage religion and hunting when he writes that the "passing of a

concept of God seems to be almost as poignant as the passing of a species" (*Talking* 84). The potential passing of tribal memory and of tribal religion is only part of the Osage dilemma, however: "The old men lament the destruction of their social structure, but they are more concerned over the consequent end of the tribe as a unit, the sudden rupture of their record, and the loss of their individual immortality" (*Talking* 86). Eagle-That-Gets-What-He-Wants is concerned about what has been happening to the young people: "Soon they will be white men and women, he says, as they will not remember very long what the old people have said." Meanwhile, as Mathews reminds his readers, the buffalo have "been displaced by the white-faced bulls" (*Talking* 89, 75), thereby drawing an obvious link between the destruction of a culture and the importation and establishment of a nonnative species, a domestic species that replaces the bison.

In the context of the disappearance of the bison and the starvation times of the Osages in the 1880s, Mathews offers a vitriolic condemnation of the white hunters in language similar to that which he uses to assert his own power on the ridges: "There had never been any reason for lack of food, except that the ubiquitous white man, in his inscrutable desire to proclaim his presence, slaughtered wild life." Mathews then somewhat romantically contrasts the European American hunter with the Native American: "Where the Indian passed in dignity, disturbing nothing and leaving Nature as he had found her; with nothing to record his passage, except a footprint or a broken twig, the white man plundered and wasted and shouted" (*Wah'Kon-Tah* 57). These passages suggest an important irony, given that in *Talking to the Moon* Mathews depicts himself as just such an avid sport hunter who does his own shouting with a gun on the ridges.

Against a landscape without bison, the narrator devotes the autumn chapters of *Talking to the Moon* to descriptions of his own hunting adventures. Although he does differentiate between hunting as necessity and hunting as sport, he himself clearly is not a subsistence hunter. In fact, the narrator details for the readers his eating habits, which demonstrate that although he does occasionally eat venison and bear, his survival is certainly not dependent on such hunted animals. He feeds himself "artificially," he says, "from cans brought from town and food from the ranch." He offers his guests "limitless beef and beer and piles of spaghetti" (*Talking* 60, 98). He also recounts the hunting he does that is specifically not for game.

Wing shooting, for example, is "particularly good sport" even though of the hunted doves he says that "we have never elevated them to the status of game" (*Talking* 152). That is, they are fit to shoot from the sky for sport, but they are not fit to eat.

The reader can see that a paradox exists between the narrator's enthusiasm for the hunt and Mathews's awareness of its tragic results. In "Admirable Outlaw," an essay he published in *Sooner Magazine*, Mathews describes an outing during which the hunters' hounds finally run down and kill a coyote. He has this to say of the victim: "As he is the embodiment of cunning, fleetness and courage, one feels that such a death is a disgrace, and unfair to such high courage. One attempts to forget . . . that this little world's long quavering howl is the very voice of the night prairie" ("Admirable" 264). That howl, of course, provides Mathews with the title to his book *Talking to the Moon*. In the book *Wah'Kon-Tah* Mathews expresses disgust with white men's hunting for sport. In the nineteenth century they "sneaked over the boundaries and slaughtered deer and turkey. . . . Later when the grazing leases were given to the cattlemen, there were no provisions protecting the game of the Reservation, and thousands of prairie chickens and quail were killed and shipped out to market. The cowboys and the hangers-on of the ranches killed deer and turkey simply for the sport of killing" (Mathews, *Wah'Kon-Tah* 56–57). In *Talking to the Moon* the narrator rationalizes the shooting of marsh hawks while they themselves hunt quail because the hawks are "invaders" and he is "indigenous": "Nature might even overlook the fact that the quail are not my chief food supply, as long as I regulate my shooting and do not upset the balance in the enjoyment of my sport" (*Talking* 214). Such comparisons with sources other than the autobiography further suggest the distance Mathews creates between narrator and historical figure, and that distance can be read as a paradox: the active hunter laments the results of his hunting.

Robert Warrior makes the point that the "terms self-determination and sovereignty connote in their most immediate sense much of the human arrogance that Mathews believed was the root of twentieth-century problems" (Warrior 101). Yet for the narrator in *Talking to the Moon*, hunting for sport engenders that very sort of arrogance. Take for example the description of one of Mathews's hunting partners, Bill Whitman. After shooting quail, Whitman declares that the hunt has made him "feel like a god—a

pagan one of course. . . . I have a superior feeling" (*Talking* 182). In an interview in 1972 Mathews describes his own feelings about hunting: "I feel that I am competing with my brothers. I never killed just for the sake of killing; I always gave them a chance" (Logsdon 74). Despite Mathews's apparent misgivings about human arrogance, the book nevertheless chronicles a man's passion for and delight in hunting, "for the sport of killing." One could argue that this passion results in part from his Osage cultural heritage, from perceived need for action, from the Hunkah of his nature, but Mathews repeatedly juxtaposes his passion for hunting with an acute awareness of its adverse affects. Through this awareness, he creates what might be called a dramatic irony. Despite his own complex feelings concerning hunting and the elimination of traditional game, the autobiographical character (the narrator) seems unaware of his complicity in the extinction of the animals he hunts. But again, there is a narrative distance between the narrator and the historical Mathews.

Despite his confession in the interview (that he does not kill merely for the sake of killing), the narrator argues that hunting from an automobile or from an airplane is good sport. After all, he calibrates the intensity of hunting as a sport according to "clean killing and danger to the hunter"; therefore, he argues, shooting from an automobile is sport because the hunter risks a flat tire and having to travel back across the prairie on foot. (See *Talking* 184.) At one time Mathews also believed that shooting at fox "from an airplane was sport" (*Talking* 186). Such sport reminds one of descriptions of how railroad businessmen would advertise buffalo hunting from the train cars as enticement for prospective rail travelers, "as added enticements to get people to ride the [rail]roads. The advertising worked, and hunting buffalo by rail became a favorite pastime for many" (Dary 85). Though Mathews had given up hunting from airplanes, he continues with other types of sport hunting throughout his time on the ridges.

In the chapter "Deer-Breeding Moon" (October)—sometimes called New-Horn Moon in response to the whitetail buck's having cleaned his antlers this time of year—the author reminds his readers that "[u]nfortunately the whitetail buck is gone from the blackjacks" (*Talking* 157). In the chapter "Coon-Breeding Moon," the "true hunting moon," Mathews explains that bear hunting rivals quail hunting for the honor of the "king of sports" (*Talking* 174, 182). The hunter finds bear hunting exhilarating

because it "awakens every nerve to incautious action" and recalls the human's once having been "the delicate, thin-skinned hunted rather than the hunter" (*Talking* 168). Despite this reference to primal man, to the hunted, however, the autobiography's apparent paradox is pervasive: Mathews reminds the reader that there are no more bear, and in the first winter chapter, "Baby-Bear Moon," laments their passing: "There are no baby bears born on the old reservation now. I imagine there are no wild bears being born in all the former domains of the Osage" (*Talking* 193). Where have all the young bears gone? Mathews seems to wonder. And Mathews answers: "All three of us were in time to see the bear reach a tall Douglas fir just in front of the hounds, jump around to the opposite side, and climb to the top swiftly." As the three hunters, the narrator among them, later skin this bear, they wonder at the bear's "size and porky fatness" (*Talking* 166). Inherent in the account of the bear hunt is the unavoidable contradiction that merits repeating: The narrator hunts the bear yet laments its disappearance from all the Osage domains.

Mathews's hunting practices are further contradictory, as are Standing Bear's as reported in *My People the Sioux*, in the sense that that they lack any spiritual element. Unlike the traditional Osages, this hunter-narrator fails to thank any spirit or the animal itself for offering up its life; he makes no offering of tobacco or otherwise. Traditionally, an Osage observed "religious rites . . . throughout the [hunting] time." According to Osage tradition, " '[s]till hunting' was forbidden under penalty of a flogging, and if a man slipped away to hunt for himself, thereby scattering the herd and causing loss to the tribe, he was punished, sometimes even to death" (qtd. in Marriott 48). Yet Mathews relates how he is often alone on the prairie hunting for bear, or deer, or coyotes. Indeed, he admits that he prefers "hunting alone" (*Talking* 175). Such hunting practices suggest the hunter's distance from any sense of spiritual connection with or respect for his Osage culture. There is no hint that nonhuman life is in any sense sacred for this hunter. Contemporary humans hunt not from necessity but for sport; hunting has become an ornamentation. For Mathews hunting is allied with playing, as suggested by the motto that he has inscribed in Latin on his mantle: "to hunt, to bathe, to play, to laugh—that is to live" (*Talking* 194). The motto recalls one of the earliest misunderstandings between Native Americans and Europeans, that from the Indian point of view hunting

was a means of livelihood not a sport. Yet for Mathews, the passage serves as the motto for his comfortable life on the ridges. He depicts hunting as sport exclusively. Such a notion lends itself to comparison with a passage from Gerald Vizenor's "Sand Creek Survivors," in which Vizenor berates the colonizers: The "white man smacks his law and order on the land, possesses the earth until it can hardly breathe, and then goes hunting in the mountains while the tribes die in his institutions" ("Sand" 43). For both Vizenor and Mathews, in this sense, European American hunting practices come to symbolize that "white" pastime that represents mistreatment of land, of nonhuman animals, and of people and their cultures.

Depictions and descriptions of the narrator's mistreatment of animals extend even beyond sport hunting and protecting his domestic animals. He sets a chicken in front of a coyote simply to see what will happen, for instance, and he captures a coyote pup knowing full well that the pup is already too old to be trained as a pet. This pup, which he names Shelia, "was hopeless as she was taken after she had begun to hunt for herself, and I wanted her only for the purpose of study in any case." He encloses her in a wire-mesh cage, observes her, comments on the mother coyote's attempts to free her, and then lets her die. "She taught me nothing," the narrator concludes: "I poked her body with a stick before opening the cage, even though my reason made me quite sure she was dead" (*Talking* 123). Both LaVonne Ruoff and Louis Owens ponder the inhumane treatment Mathews demonstrates in this instance. Ruoff notes that the narrator maintains a "scientific detachment" and that he "coldly comments" on the fact that he learned nothing from the pup's death (Ruoff, "John" 10). In responding to this particular episode, Louis Owens writes that "Mathews's indifference to the suffering of the young coyote or her mother's heroic attempts to free her is hard to grasp. One is tempted to conclude that Mathews had imbibed the darkest elements of the empirical tradition of Western civilization. . . . It is impossible to imagine this kind of cruel experiment fitting into a Native view of the natural world" (Owens, "Disturbed" 171). An appreciation for the narrator's constructed distance from any Native American worldview might help explain what Owens describes as an apparent impossibility. However one explains it, it is precisely such an apparent paradox, such a distance between the narrator and the historical Mathews that provides a complexity of the autobiographical account.

Through descriptions of his hunting, his accounts of disturbing the balance of nature on the ridges, and his essentially ignoring the contemporary political concerns of the Osages, Mathews can be seen as playing an incredibly complex role as man and as narrator of his autobiographical account of ten years on the ridges. On the one hand he both laments and prognosticates the passing of an age, the near passing of Osage culture, a passing that parallels that of the bison, the bear, and the whitetail deer. On the other hand, the settler-narrator is, throughout the entire account, an active participant in bringing about the deaths of those animals and thus indirectly that culture. As a hunter he has killed off the bear in Osage lands. As settler and homebuilder he has disturbed the balance with his composite roof, his well, and his imported hundred-dollar chickens. As farmer he has introduced conflict and necessitated and participated in the killing of skunks, snakes, and coyotes. As beef-eater and automobile driver he has actively participated in and contributed to the very culture he critiques. As an amateur naturalist, he lets the coyote pup die of exposure. In his opposition to such aspects of culture, he has relied on and perpetrated the very actions he condemns and has become victim to the very attitudes and practices he exposes. As Osage autobiographer, in stark contrast, Mathews offers a powerful critique of European American civilization, provides a glimpse of Osage culture and history, and with great skill describes life on the ridges. By depicting and implying the distance between the narrator and the historical Mathews, by depicting himself as one of the spoilers, he exposes the spoilage.

> Eventually, she gives me a metaphor that I find helpful during the blackest of moments. She compares the deepest wells of depression to gestation, to a time enclosed, a secluded lightlessness in which, unknown and unforced, we grow.
> —*Louise Erdrich,* The Blue Jay's Dance

CHAPTER FIVE

"She Gives Me a Metaphor"
Survival and Louise Erdrich's The Blue Jay's Dance

By the time John Joseph Mathews published the autobiographical work *Talking to the Moon* (1945), he had had his first novel republished as a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection, he enjoyed the widespread recognition that such a publication affords, and he had written and published a second novel. Mathews writes about the Osages in and around Pawhuska, Oklahoma, in his first book, *Wah'Kon-Tah* (1932), and in his second, the semiautobiographical *Sundown* (1934), he depicts the life of a mixed-blood Osage man as he attends college, participates as a pilot in World War I, and attempts to reject his Osage heritage. Similarly, by the time she published her memoir *The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year* (1995), Louise Erdrich had already gained widespread recognition as a Native American author. She had published four novels and two volumes of poetry; for her first novel *Love Medicine* (1984) she had won the National Book Critics Circle Award; and she had coauthored a novel with Michael Dorris, *The Crown of Columbus* (1991). The subject matter of Erdrich's and Mathews's previously published books is almost exclusively Native American. Erdrich sets her books on and near the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota

and writes about several Ojibwa families over the course of generations. (*The Beet Queen*, most of whose primary characters are European Americans, is an exception, of course.) In short, by the time they published their respective memoirs, both Erdrich and Mathews had already established themselves as major Native American writers.

In addition to this clear name recognition, however, in the course of the memoirs, both Mathews and Erdrich identify themselves as writers, even though these memoirs are ostensibly about subjects other than writing. Mathews records his ten years on the blackjack ridges above Pawhuska, and Erdrich relates her experiences with the birthing and rearing of her daughters. Mathews seems less interested in describing his writing than does Erdrich, but he does refer to the fact that his friends call attention to his "public," saying that his readers remember that he was a writer: those friends, reports Mathews, "attempted to make it appear that these people were waiting for another book from me" (Mathews, *Talking* 13). And in the "Deer-Breeding Moon" chapter, he confesses that in the fall he must leave his writing to go hunting: "If I have not finished my work at the typewriter when this moon comes to the blackjacks, I must push it aside" (*Talking* 156). Such brief mentions of his public and his work at the typewriter may well be enough to remind his readers that he is indeed a writer. It is a means of authenticating himself, a means of reminding his readers that his name as author has a certain cachet.

For Erdrich the fact of the narrator as writer is much more central to the memoir. She notes early on that her "cabin" is her work place, a small house that is merely across the road from the house in which she lives with her husband and children. She spends her days in that cabin, writing. When she cannot sleep at night, she switches genres: "I write poems during the late nights up until the week of birth, and fiction by day. I suppose one could say, pulling in the obvious metaphors, that my work is hormone driven, inscribed in mother's milk, pregnant with itself" (*Blue* 24–25). She also discusses the general paucity of birth narratives, and includes discussion of other women writers: "Every female writer starts out with a list of other female writers in her head. Mine includes, quite pointedly, a mother list." Of interest to Erdrich in her immediate context is, of course, other women with children who became, or who have become, published writers. As she goes through her list, she realizes that until recently, women

with children were rarely, very rarely, published writers: "Still it is only now that mothers in any number have written literature" (*Blue* 144, 145). Early in the narrative she acknowledges and laments that the "problem inherent to birth narratives is also historical—women haven't had a voice or education, or have been overwhelmed, unconscious, stifled, just plain worn out or worse, ill to the death" (*Blue* 43). The women who did not write, Erdrich suggests, must have had to choose the (perhaps literal, perhaps figurative) survival of their children over any other career, including writing.

In addition to both enjoying reputations as writers, both Erdrich and Mathews are known as American Indians. Although as pointed out in the previous chapter, Mathews does not identify himself as Osage in his memoir, he does offer his readers any number of suggestions that he is interested in Osage history and tradition, Osage art and survival. One can read Mathews's decision not to self-identify as a means of making a strong point about being Osage after all. In stark contrast to Mathews, Erdrich very deliberately indicates that she, or her narrator, is Native American, referring several times in different ways to her Ojibwa parentage and heritage.

For Erdrich these various elements of her life and calling and her heritage come together in shaping her memoir. Her writing, her self-identifying as Ojibwa, her overt struggle to survive through writing, all come together consciously, especially in her attitude toward the natural surroundings. To overcome her horizon sickness, for example, she longs to "get out," to be in nature, as it were, ideally in the wild (for her that means, ideally, eastern North Dakota), but outside in New England will do: "to compensate for horizon sickness, for the great longing that seems both romantically German and pragmatically Ojibwa in origin, I find solace in trees" (*Blue* 91). As a writer, she intimates, both her physical and mental needs are related to her work: "the impulse to get outside hits me, strengthens, becomes again a habit of thought, a reason for storytelling" (*Blue* 89). And storytelling, writing, is for Erdrich a means of survival: "A woman needs to tell her own story, to tell the bloody version of the fairy tale," she exclaims, and yet "the writing that ate me up, that saved my life, drove me over the brink . . . will not be my story in this house" (*Blue* 104). Instead, the story that will survive and that enabled her survival, insists Erdrich, will be of the natural world: "the narrative of flowers" (*Blue* 107). It is thus the foxglove,

for example, that Erdrich nurtures: "as if in the presence of the foxglove these ghosts are not so much laid to rest as still able to partake of the rich and rooted fullness of this life" (*Blue* 110). If only by implication then, Erdrich insists that survival comes through story and story's relation to the natural world; in a very important and fundamental way, this is what *The Blue Jay's Dance* is about.

In both *Talking to the Moon* and *The Blue Jay's Dance*, the narrators describe in great detail how they interact with and interpret the natural world in the context of their consciousness of the delicate balance between survival and death. As suggested in the previous chapter, Mathews is concerned with the balance of nature: how he is but a human interloper on the ridges and how that affects (and ultimately disrupts) the balance. Mathews also participates in the preservation of Osage culture and history, especially in his descriptions of the months. Erdrich does not seem to be nearly so self-aware of how she disturbs the balance of nature though her interactions with and observations of the natural world, especially since her narrative is primarily concerned with the health and survival of her children. Nevertheless awareness of her natural surroundings and her articulation of that awareness does play a central role in the memoir. The book's title itself comes from the potentially suicidal bluff-dance of the blue jay, an image that suggests the fragility of life, the ominous and ubiquitous threat of death, and the author's recognition of the possibility of her own need for self-sacrifice. The title thus insists on the delicate balance between preying and being preyed on, and hence between life and death. For Erdrich, as for Mathews, the issues are not necessarily issues of literal physical survival. Erdrich after all moves in an extremely comfortable and secure socioeconomic realm. The very fact of her having a separate house on a New Hampshire farm for her writing studio suggests the physical and economic comfort of the world she lives in. Yet a need for or an interest in physical survival haunts the book. The seriousness of that need manifests itself in the notion of the "blackest of moments" (*Blue* 37) that one must endure as well as in her repeated reflections on suicide.

In the surprisingly few responses to the book, critics do at least mention Erdrich's acknowledgment of the role that nature plays in the memoir. Both Rochelle Johnson, in a brief review, and Trudelle Thomas note in passing that *The Blue Jay's Dance* is at least in part nature writing. Accord-

ing to Johnson, for instance, some of the sections of *The Blue Jay's Dance* are "nature writing essays" (Johnson 646). In another essay, Susan Castillo notes that landscape "figures prominently in Erdrich's autobiographical construction of selfhood" (Castillo 40). David Stirrup mentions Erdrich's birth memoir only in passing when he makes note of the "very personal connection to land, and family, that Erdrich describes" (Stirrup 29). Erdrich herself offers that her book is at least in part about nonhuman nature, about "wild places in the world" (*Blue* 5). Interested in other aspects of the autobiography, none of the critics seeks to develop the ideas suggested by the author's acknowledgment of the importance of her interaction with the natural world.

Perhaps most immediately obvious in the context of the role of nature is Erdrich's use of seasons as a structural device or organizing principle. In fact, both Erdrich and Mathews use it. After two introductory chapters, Mathews divides his book into four seasons, beginning with spring. He further divides each season into three chapters, each denoting the Osage identification of the moon. In a much looser form, after a brief "Dedication and Household Map" section, Erdrich also offers the four seasons as sections of the memoir, beginning with winter. She divides each of those sections into numerous parts, loosely related to the seasons. For Erdrich, winter is the in utero time; spring the nursing and nurturing; summer, reflections on love and family; and fall, the weaning. Like Henry David Thoreau who in *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854) condenses his two years, two months, and two days at the pond into one year, Erdrich and Mathews both condense several years' experiences into a single year for the sake of unity and structural cohesion. Mathews reduces to one the ten years he spent on the ridges; Erdrich combines the experiences of giving birth to three daughters into one "birth year."

As the seasonal structure suggests, the establishment of a natural temporal rhythm is important to Erdrich's narrative, and the importance of natural time is reflected in the content of the chapters. One of her contentions during the winter section, for example, is that it is the time for planning (though not planting) a flower garden: "All of this [planning] I do, undo, redo, night after night. I am clothed in deep winter" (*Blue* 30). Spring begins with the first night of the baby's life, and the first subchapter of the "Fall" section describes a frosty night in early September when as

a teenager Erdrich was visited by a skunk. The memoir ends in the fall with a description of the baby's learning to walk: "She has yanked herself up, stepped, and it is clear from her grand excitement that walking is one of the most important things we ever do" (*Blue* 221). As Erdrich notes, if all goes as it is supposed to, the baby will one day walk away, as well she should, and the cycle will come back on itself. Winter will follow. If all goes according to nature, children will grow to adulthood and on their own will walk away.

In addition to stressing the importance of a natural, seasonal rhythm and the cyclical aspect of time, Erdrich (like Mathews) emphasizes the importance of place through the reference to her cabin. From this place, this cabin only slightly removed from the nearby community, she discovers and explores nature, and from it she ventures into writing about nature from the perspective of a writer literally inside (and outside) her cabin. Her perspective is thus somewhat removed from the mainstream. Erdrich's "cabin" is less removed than Mathews's in that it is simply across the road from the house in which she lives another part of her life, yet it too is that place from which she sets out on her literal and figurative walks through pregnancy and the natural world.

Issues of survival (survival of the animals, the Osage people, the narrator himself) are obviously and overtly important to Mathews's narrative, and although her interaction with and attitude toward her natural surroundings is strikingly different from Mathews's (the hunter's), Erdrich too records her experiences with nonhuman nature as a means to talk about survival. "For a writer," she clarifies, "work is also emotional and intellectual survival; it is who I am" (*Blue* 5). Both writers recount experiences with skunks and coyotes, for example; but whereas Mathews, as we have seen, describes the vengeful shooting of a skunk that has robbed his hen house, Erdrich describes her encounter as benign, yet a profound learning experience results from it. Mathews practices his cold-blooded and deadly experiment on a coyote pup and his hunting of coyotes, in contrast to Erdrich who laments the absence of coyotes, noting that the hunting of coyotes is rampant: "There is now an open season on coyote here, with radio-collar hunting legal" (*Blue* 119). Because of the open season, notes Erdrich, "[o]ut here, coyotes have become so preternaturally elusive that they don't dare howl. They have fallen silent, and somehow they have

survived." In the context of the balance of nature, Erdrich acknowledges that she "would rather have coyotes in the woods controlling the deer herd than most of the hunters" she meets (*Blue* 119). Erdrich seems unable to establish or keep distinct the dual worldviews she comes across. She finds connections or unity where at first she sees duality. She cannot help but insist on a connection between the death of a coyote and a related problem, such as the overpopulation of deer or the absence of other forms of wildlife, in this instance, coyotes themselves.

At the beginning of the fall section of the narrative, Erdrich describes an experience she has with a skunk. Her response is indicative of how she identifies with nonhuman nature and is able to acknowledge that the animal has much to teach her. When she is young, before she has children, she spends the night in the middle of a North Dakota football field. She is in her sleeping bag when she is joined by a skunk: "At the back of my knees, on the quilting of my sleeping bag, it trod out a spot for itself and then, with a serene little groan, curled up and lay perfectly still" (*Blue* 167). She and the skunk spend the night together, and she comes away relatively unscathed. Later she has the physical and mental distance from the event (and the actual skunk) to philosophize about the identity between herself and the skunk: "I may be a woman who has dreamed herself a skunk, or a skunk still dreaming that she is a woman" (*Blue* 169). As a young woman, she recalls, her "emotions had seemed vast, dark, and sickeningly private. But they were minor, mere wisps, compared to skunk." Whatever the philosophical status of her connectedness with or to the skunk, she realizes through this experience that she had gone to the field "afflicted with a sadness," and she comes away with a new understanding (*Blue* 172, 171). She has learned from the skunk.

Erdrich demonstrates her ability to fuse a regard for the nonhuman natural world with her exposé on human birthing and the raising of three daughters (as well as participating in the rearing of her husband's three older, adopted children)—all this in the context of writing itself. Here Erdrich contrasts sharply with someone like Thomas Lyon, who writes that "the fundamental goal of the genre [of nature writing] is to turn our attention outward to the activity of nature" (Lyon 7). Erdrich turns our attention inward. In the context of giving birth, for example, she declares the writer's helplessness in the face of the natural rhythms of life: "Birth is dictated to

the consciousness by the conscious body. There are certain frustrations in approaching such an event, a drama in which the body stars and not the fiction-making mind" (*Blue* 43). In this sense, Erdrich's writing itself can be seen to be looking forward to future generations.

In turning away from a "constructed" narrative to a "trust" in the body, a turn inward, as it were, Erdrich makes the emphatic point that humans are animals, that they are a part of nature; in many ways not superior to it, not always separate from it. As regards the animal need to eat, for example, Erdrich describes how she feeds the birds, then how she thinks of her own eating as an expectant mother: "It isn't just eating. . . . I never know which bite is destined for the heart, the muscles, hair, the bones forming like stalks of flowers, or the lovely eyes" (*Blue* 13). Further reminding her readers that humans are indeed animals, she writes that "it seems unfair that because I am a mammal I am condemned to give birth through the lower part of my body" (*Blue* 34). Like mammals yes, but humans share similarities with other animals as well. Erdrich describes what she calls the rape of a mallard, the wooing songs of crickets and grasshoppers, and the dance of a Luna moth: "Each night the fireflies flash out a Morse code of desire. I will not read it. I know in my heart the message. I know the end result of this dance of brutal fascinations, this love riot" (*Blue* 80). This aspect of Erdrich's "nature writing" demonstrates her recognition of her and her children's place as a part of the natural world. She argues here, as with the reference to hunting coyotes, for the human place in nature and implies the imperative of carefully maintaining a balance. By telling the story of her offering her daughters' hair for a bird's nest, Erdrich presents another striking example of the interrelationships between the human and nonhuman animal worlds. After each brushing, she saves the hair and then sets it outside on a stump for an indigo bunting or a finch to find and use in its nest. In the autumn, after the leaves have fallen, she finds the nest: "It is almost too painful to hold the nest, too rich, as life often is with children. . . . I see the bird, quick breathing, small, thrilling like a heart. . . . I see that bird alone in the nest woven from the hair of my daughters, and I cannot hold the nest because longing seizes me" (*Blue* 68–69).

At the same time that Erdrich identifies a similarity, a unity, or even an identity between human and nonhuman nature, between human being and nonhuman animal, however, she also refers often and repeatedly to a

complex sense of duality, both between herself and the outside world and a duality within herself. When she recounts having crawled under her cabin to retrieve a lost and crying kitten, for example, she describes that person, the person who crawled under the house, as "an empty double": "I hadn't thought about it then, but now I could clearly see part of me, the husk of myself . . . a person sacrificed to ensure the good luck of a temple, a kind of house god, a woman lying down there, still, an empty double" (*Blue* 103). At another point she depicts this duality in the context of life after death. She acknowledges the disintegration of the body on the molecular level, but she demurs: "I want something of the self on whom I have worked so hard to survive the loss of the body" (*Blue* 170). Erdrich asserts that she wants more than the knowledge that she will have existed. She does not mention her daughters or her writing in this context, interestingly enough; instead she focuses on the self, the physical body, and some sort of spirit that might survive physical death.

In their critiques, both Rochelle Johnson and Trudelle Thomas mention the idea of duality—physical versus spiritual—in their responses to pregnancy in Erdrich's memoir. Thomas refers to such a duality to develop her thesis that mothering offers "opportunities for spiritual growth" (Thomas 287). Johnson identifies the idea of duality as a "conflict that develops . . . while [a woman's] body is wholly present during birth, her self—her soul—at times seems lost" (Johnson 648). Erdrich does provide evidence for such a reading. She describes, for example, a certain sense of the division of self: "I have been cut in two and suddenly I miss my other half" (*Blue* 152). In other instances, however, she denies or challenges such an easy representation of the duality she describes. She writes that birth "is intensely spiritual and physical all at once" (*Blue* 44), and in writing about her baby specifically, she acknowledges that there is at the same moment both a separation and a lack of separation: "my acts are hers and I do not even think. . . . Yet, where I stop for her or where her needs, exactly, begin, I must dance for her" (*Blue* 195). This sense of dancing echoes the title: the blue jay's dance is a protective, but potentially fatal bluff, done in order that the offspring might survive.

Such notions of doubling or of duality that recur throughout Erdrich's memoir can be seen, in a sense, as indicative of the distinction between the spiritual and the mundane. In this sense, Erdrich sets up what are ap-

parently straightforward, distinct dichotomies, which she then challenges. She tends to collapse the very duality she establishes by constantly calling it into question. She is, for example, simultaneously joyous and stressed or both delighted and irritated by the blue jay or by the cat whose life she saves. She takes care of the cat, and even comes to appreciate it (although, as she confesses, she does not in general like cats). She repeatedly sets up such dualities of some sort and often attempts to identify a difference or to discount them altogether. She feels that she begins to "absorb" other mothers, for example, yet at the same time she acknowledges that she remains separate from them. And with her own children she argues that "we're slowly made up of one another and yet wholly ourselves" (*Blue* 161).

Erdrich attributes the creative impulse to action and the physical when she argues that it is love, even physical love, that inspires creativity. She characterizes the love that she describes as very earthy, very physical: "Because we can't control the fixation of love and desire, we experience emotional mayhem—stories, fiction, works of art result" (*Blue* 106). Erdrich further suggests a fusion of the two impulses when she compares her baby's playing and her own writing. For the baby play is her work; it is what she does to learn to survive: "It is what I am doing now. My face is hers. Unyielding eagerness. That is her work, just as this page is my play, just as all this is our life. It is what we do, afraid and avid, full of desire, hurling ourselves again and again toward the musical object" (*Blue* 133). Implicit in this comparison between a baby's and a writer's work is Erdrich's notion of writing as a means of survival. A baby plays to learn how to survive while in her own effort to survive, the mother writes.

As noted above, Erdrich herself, or the narrator of the memoir, seems to think it important that she identify herself as Ojibwa, mentioning her heritage several times in the course of the book. Missing or ignoring these frequent and thematically significant instances in which Erdrich insists on her Ojibwa heritage, Trudelle Thomas, in her article "Motherhood as Spiritual Crisis," insists that the author of the memoir has much in common with the two other women—Dorothy Day, who wrote *The Long Loneliness* (1952), and Anne Lamott, author of *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year* (1993)—whose work she critiques: "These three writers share a Christian worldview and they are alike in other ways as well: they are American, Caucasian, and heterosexual." Thomas then adds paren-

thetically that Erdrich is actually "mixed blood, Caucasian and Chippewa" (Thomas 275). Throughout *The Blue Jay's Dance*, however, Erdrich insists repeatedly on her Ojibwa identity: "All land west of the Appalachians was still Indian territory and the people from whom I am descended on my mother's side, the Ojibwa or Anishinabe, lived lightly upon it, leaving few traces of their complicated passage other than their own teeth and bones" (*Blue* 98). And although the book is written in English, the mother's milk, as it were, is Ojibwa. Speaking of her daughter's learning to speak, Erdrich notes that words (Ojibwa words in this instance) get her things. She quickly learns, for instance, the word "*Do-dush-abo*, meaning 'breast-water,' the Ojibwa word for milk" (*Blue* 213).

Given Erdrich's frequent references to herself as Ojibwa throughout the book (in contrast to very little mention of her European heritage) and given the central role that that Ojibwa heritage plays, Thomas's essay is troubling enough. But also problematic is that Thomas argues that Erdrich "shares a Christian world view" with the other writers (Thomas 275). In *The Blue Jay's Dance* Erdrich actually finds serious fault with Christianity, maintaining that "[o]rganized Christian religion is more often about denying the body when what we profoundly need are rituals that take into regard the blood, the shock, the heat, the shit, the anguish, the irritation, the glory, the earnestness of the female body" (*Blue* 47). This seems hardly an endorsement. Erdrich writes this passage in the context of the failure of Western religions, especially Christianity, to recognize in their rituals and traditions the fact of giving birth. She states categorically that for "religions to make sense to women, there should be a birth ritual" (*Blue* 46–47). More helpful and thus more worthy of endorsement, Erdrich implies, would be a form of worship that takes its cue from nature. We need a nature writing that includes the human being as part of the natural world, specifically in this instance, the human female animal that gives birth, like the boar that Erdrich stumbles upon on one of her walks through the woods—intensely aware of her body and of her bond with her infant. In another instance Erdrich does acknowledge that there are indeed women who choose life paths other than that of pregnancy and motherhood.

Erdrich's narrator identifies somewhat paradoxical dualities in certain specific contexts, paradoxes that she attempts to reconcile through her account of birthing a child and through her observations of nature. As she

herself writes, it is as if she is "confronted by a paralyzing koan" (*Blue* 24), a paradox she must break free of. It is in this sense in particular that I argue that *The Blue Jay's Dance* is a book about survival, survival of the individual, survival of the family (especially the mother-daughter aspect of family), and survival of the larger social unit, the tribe. And this survival is intrinsically bound up in the human relationship to and the survival of the nonhuman natural world. Nowhere is this issue of survival more pronounced than in the narrator's contemplations on suicide. She mentions that there had been a suicide in the house before she moved into it to do her writing. Although she does not know the details, she writes that she senses the aura of whatever it was that might have inspired that suicide; it remains in both the figurative and literal space she occupies: "Perhaps it is odd to contemplate a subject as grim as suicide while anticipating a child so new she'll wear a navel tassel and smell of nothing but her purest self, but beginnings suggest endings and I can't help thinking about the continuum, the span, the afters, and the befores" (*Blue* 8). At another point in her recollections, Erdrich explains the connection another way: "What the body remembers of birth it anticipates as death" (*Blue* 102). With a baby on her lap watching the first snowfall, the mother recognizes that "[w]e do not ask for life. . . . We are free at any time to lay it down . . . as the man who once sat in this little house did, choosing his way over what he must have seen in front of him: this view of stilled trees" (*Blue* 193). Of course, that is not to be Erdrich's resolution. She chooses life in the face of her depression, and her metaphor for that choice is the blue jay.

The book's title—and thus the central metaphor of the memoir, as mentioned above—refers to the potentially suicidal dance of a blue jay in front of a hawk. Confronted by a gray hawk, the outsized jay "raises its wings, and dances *toward* the gray hawk. . . . the jay, ridiculous, continues to dance, hopping forward, hornpiping up and down with tiny leaps." This potentially suicidal dance fascinates the narrator: "That dance makes me clench down hard on life. But it is also a dance that in other circumstances might lead me, you, anyone, to choose a voluntary death" (*Blue* 194, 195). Through the example of the blue jay Erdrich suggests the similarities between different nonhuman species and *Homo sapiens*; certainly she draws parallels between humans' efforts to survive and the blue jay's dance in front of a bird of prey. Thus, where Mathews argues that the urge to protect

one's young introduces an imbalance between human and nature in the *Homo sapiens*' struggle to survive, Erdrich suggests that that same need, that same urge, actually is a part of the balance. Because of the connection between, in this case, mother and daughter, but also because of the connection between life forms in general, she does not differentiate. Erdrich chooses life. She looks at her baby and decides to live: "Since the two of us are still in the process of differentiating, since my acts are hers and I do not even think, yet, where I must dance for her. I must be the one to dip and twirl in the cold glare and I must teach her, as she grows, the unlikely steps" (*Blue* 195–96). And ultimately, those unlikely steps involve both the child's walking away and the possibility of self-sacrifice.

There is another sense of death that comes not from a sacrifice as such but from inexplicable depression and a leaning toward death that is analogous to what Erdrich identifies as the wild. In brooding over the notions of wildness and wilderness, she asks several questions: "So what is wild? What is wilderness? What are dreams but an internal wilderness and what is desire but a wildness of the soul?" (*Blue* 182). Does she mean desire to live? She offers the skunk as an example of an animal to be envied in this context. The skunk has no natural enemies, gestates and gives birth in just two months, "and fall[s] into a state of dreaming torpor when the cold [bites] hard" (*Blue* 183). Skunks are allowed to come and go as they please, remaining wild and free. Erdrich laments that "[w]hen every inch of the world is known, sleep may be the only wilderness that we have left" (*Blue* 190). And it is through sleep that the body, unaided by the conscious mind, repairs itself: "While I am not there to impede its work, my body takes lessons on how to save me" (*Blue* 191). In the throes of labor, as another instance of her identification with nonhuman animals, she acknowledges that "[t]hrown down, I rely on animal fierceness" (*Blue* 45). Mammalian sleep and the instinctual will to live are instrumental in bringing her through her depression.

Through her thoughts on suicide and death, Erdrich identifies a duality and then attempts to deny it: "On those days, suicide is an idea too persistent for comfort. *There isn't a self to kill*," she emphasizes. "That person is gone. Yet, once I've established that I have no personal self, killing whatever remains seems hardly worth the effort" (*Blue* 114). Another way she is able to overcome the urge toward death and to deal with the death of

her grandparents is to walk: "To walk off the panic" she takes to "the trail, punching toeholds, ascending, trying to outwalk death" (*Blue* 197). Finding her emotions fluctuating, the narrator is either thrilled or depressed, even anguished, throughout her pregnancy, she confides in her midwife, and it is the midwife, Erdrich acknowledges, who provides her with a metaphor to make similar connections: "she gives me a metaphor that I find helpful during the blackest of moments. She compares the deepest wells of depression to gestation, to a time enclosed, a secluded lightlessness in which, unknown and unforced, we grow" (*Blue* 37). Erdrich is able to overcome the urge to death, to survive even the darkest of moments, and to survive as a mother, as an observer of nature, as a writer, and as the granddaughter of an Ojibwa man and woman. Thus survival takes on important meanings in personal, familial, and broader contexts. It is in these senses that Erdrich's narrative is about survival.

Erdrich recounts that, in addition to walking, she deals with her grandfather's death by describing his life and his owl. Early in the memoir she speaks of her heritage, identifying specifically her "Ojibwa grandfather, who provided for a dozen children during the Great Depression from his lush Turtle Mountain Reservation" (*Blue* 27). Later she names this maternal grandfather, Patrick Gourneau: "former tribal chairman, powwow dancer, a man of subtle humor and intelligence" (*Blue* 184). She also identifies her maternal grandmother: "Mary LeFavor, my grandmother—Ojibwa, French, Scots" (*Blue* 138). This identification with her Ojibwa ancestry, to the near exclusion of mentioning her European ancestry, suggests the importance she places on her Native heritage in the context of writing about the birth of her daughter, about suicide and death, and about her contemplations of the wild.

Through these frequent references to herself as Ojibwa, especially in the second half of the book, Erdrich emphasizes the relative importance of her Native heritage, especially in the context of survival. She describes three photographs, for example: one of her Ojibwa grandmother, one of her mother, and one of herself (see *Blue* 138–40). She explains her homesickness for the Great Plains, missing the openness of the landscape, the wildness, and the customs. She infers a comparison between her own homesickness and the hiemal psychosis suffered by Ojibwa hunters who saw nothing but white for months on end during the Dakota winters (*Blue*

30). She offers transcriptions of a few Ojibwa words: for mother's milk, *do-dush-abo* (*Blue* 213); for the blue jay, *diindiisi* (*Blue* 160), and for her grandfather's favorite bird, the owl, *kokoko* (*Blue* 188). She describes the Ojibwa language as "a language that sounds like water hitting the bottom of a boat" (*Blue* 187). She mentions Ojibwa burial customs (*Blue* 96), makes note of her relatives who were "traditionals" and who were thus buried outside the Catholic cemetery, and she contrasts Ojibwa with non-Indian customs (*Blue* 186). She writes that she would "rather die in the familiar landscape where the grave markers of [her] recent ancestors stand crooked in the deep mold of oak leaves, or where they are part of the landscape itself, as Ojibwa once buried their dead high in the bones of trees" (*Blue* 96). Through such passages she not only self-identifies as Ojibwa, but she also specifically links herself and her tribe with the natural world (a natural world that includes humans).

The Blue Jay's Dance is a memoir about survival, but the survivals of more than merely the narrator herself through a birth year and her daughters. It is a story about the survival of a people: "The tale that will live on is the same that survives the other woman, that is, the narrative of flowers" (*Blue* 107). Erdrich frames her book with depictions of birth and death—in the beginning with the births of her daughters set against the deaths of grandparents at the end. Her depression and her attempts to overcome those deaths are at the center of the autobiography. The thought of her grandparents' deaths depresses her in ways she cannot comprehend, and she fights this depression with every argument she can invent: I "tried my best to walk it off, run it off, drink it out, crush it with leaves and solitude on the Plains or in the accepting Northeastern woods. . . . Somehow, over all these miles, I must have been sustained by my grandparents even more than I knew, because the silence in their wake roars over me" (*Blue* 184). Erdrich seems especially to miss her maternal grandfather: "The depth of his loss seems almost out of proportion . . . as the old go walking into night, we lose our sense of time's extension, we lose our witness, our living memories. We lose them and we lose the farthest reach of ourselves" (*Blue* 186). In an effort to regain those reaches of herself she too walks, but she also focuses on her daughter and on her Ojibwa heritage. It becomes for her a matter of survival.

In the opening pages of her novel *Tracks* (1988), a novel that is literally

about survival on the land, Erdrich begins by having Nanapush describe the relationship between the deaths and near extinctions of the wildlife and the deaths of many Ojibwa people during the dying time: "We started dying before the snow, and like the snow, we continued to fall," recalls Nanapush. Then in a move similar to Mathews's in *Talking to the Moon*, Nanapush relates his own contribution to those deaths: "I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years' growth" (*Tracks* 1, 2). Despite the dying time and his own complicity in the deaths, as Nanapush describes it with these introductory images, like *Talking to the Moon* and like *The Blue Jay's Dance*, *Tracks* is ultimately a novel about survival. That same Nanapush saves Fleur, and Fleur's daughter Lulu returns to the reservation from her schooling. Fleur herself, after preparing her forest in trickster fashion for the woodcutters, leaves on her own trek of survival. Erdrich's novel *The Painted Drum* (2005) is also about survival, and like *The Blue Jay's Dance*, survival that comes with potential for sacrifice and suicide. At the center of this novel is the story of what Shaawano interprets as a sacrificial suicide. In order to keep the wolves, which "were only hungry," from attacking her mother or baby sister, or her five-year-old brother alone in the snow somewhere behind the wagon, she realized she was the one: " 'And in that moment of knowledge, don't you think being who she was, of the old sort of Anishinaabeg who thinks of the good of the people first, she jumped?' " (*Painted* 117). In that sacrificial suicide, Erdrich can be seen in a sense to be playing out in fiction some of the issues she ponders in her descriptions of the blue jay's dance in the memoir. The young girl acts out what the narrator of *The Blue Jay's Dance* can only ruminate on; were it necessary, she declares, she too would make the sacrifice. In the novel, the girl jumps; the others survive.

Similarly, I would argue, *The Blue Jay's Dance* is a book about survival. Life, according to this narrative, goes on, and it goes on in part through the Ojibwa mother's integral relationship to the earth, her devotion to her daughters and their great-grandparents, and her fierceness to survive despite the darkness that sometimes surrounds her heart. Her recognition of her intimate relationship with the earth is an important part of that continuance. One of the final accounts Erdrich offers in her birth year memoir is of the death of her maternal (Ojibwa) grandfather, yet as she returns along a North Dakota highway from her grandfather's burial ceremony,

she informs her readers that "[s]ome Ojibwa people fear the owl, *kokoko*, but my grandfather kept an owl as a pet for many years." She juxtaposes mention of the baby asleep in the car and the owl, and as she crosses the reservation boundary, that transitional zone, she actually sees "a great owl roosting on a post near the highway" (*Blue* 188). Such a sighting in such a context must be considered a good omen. She travels east with her daughter who will soon learn to walk, and she is accompanied by a sort of spirit of her child's great-grandfather. Thus the generations ride into the future.

The earth frets and cries in her sleep. White men come and murder the great trees, bleeding them into rich men's homes.
—*Louis Owens,* Bone Game

CHAPTER SIX

Cultural Identity, Storytelling, Place
Revision and Return in Louis Owens's Wolfsong

In her novel *Four Souls* (2004) Louise Erdrich picks up where the earlier novel *Tracks* ends, with Fleur's leaving her deforested home. The opening passage of the more recent book includes a reference to the great trees that go into the building of rich people's homes: "all this made of wood, fine-grained, very old-grown, quartersawn oak that still in its season and for many years after would exude beads of thin sap—as though recalling growth and life on the land belonging to Fleur Pillager and the shores of Matchimanito, beyond" (Erdrich, *Four* 9). In a similar spirit, Louis Owens begins his novel *Wolfsong* (1991) with a reference to the lumber that is being trucked out of the valley. Like Erdrich's novel and her memoir *The Blue Jay's Dance*, Owens's book is about survival, survival of the individual character Tom, survival of the "Stehemish" people in northwest Washington, survival of their culture, and survival of an intact natural world. And Owens himself (through his character Tom) is caught between an awareness of stereotypes of American Indians (especially those made manifest in nineteenth-century Plains culture) and his apparently firm belief that American Indians do indeed sense and practice a connection with

the landscape that is missing in European American culture. As we have seen in his response to Mathews's description of his killing of the coyote, Owens can be said to believe in a unique "Native view of the natural world" (Owens, "Disturbed" 171).

Hitchhiking the last thirty miles home for his uncle's funeral at the beginning of *Wolfsong*, Tom Joseph, who has been away at school, gets a ride with Amel, a trucker he knows who makes his living hauling timber out of the valley. The reader is immediately privy to Tom's jumbled train of thought: "The telegram had said, 'Our uncle is dead. Funeral next Thursday.' Jimmy's name was on it. A Kenworth loaded with cedar logs shot past out of the valley and Amel waved. It was traditional to wait four days for the funeral. He wondered where they were finding the old-growth cedar. Cedar was sacred" (*Wolfsong* 20). These thoughts suggest several of the novel's concerns. Through Tom's perspective, Owens introduces issues relating to roles of family members and non-Indian friends in the context of logging, for example. The juxtaposition of cutting sacred cedar and the uncle's death implies that capitalistic destruction also involves the physical, spiritual, and familial lives and deaths of the people (both Indian and non-Indian who live, work, and worship in the valley). The scene also allows Owens to fuse the key elements in Tom Joseph's search for identity: reconciling himself with the landscape; gaining a sense of the importance of story, history, and culture; and coming to terms with racial environmental politics. The passage juxtaposes the tradition of waiting four days for a funeral and a logging truck carrying "dead" cedar logs out of the valley, and it also introduces the complexity of a character like Amel (a friend of Tom's), whom Owens presents as a decent person, but who at the same time participates in the harvesting of sacred cedar.

Owens's novel recounts confrontations in mainstream America's war against the environment, and the author suggests that in battle after battle, European Americans (sometimes with the paid help of Native Americans) ravage the land. As they do their logging, mining, and building of roads, they destroy not only the literal, physical lands, but they also threaten a fundamental spiritual connection to it. In N. Scott Momaday's terms, "we have become disoriented . . . we have suffered a kind of psychic dislocation" (Momaday, *Man* 47). As mainstream Americans lose sight of a fundamental connection to the land, they invite spiritual death. Like so

many other Americans, Tom Joseph suffers just such a sense of dislocation. There is a difference in what Tom faces, however. Whereas other characters in the novel—including Tom's brother—fail to establish an appropriate land ethic, whereas they fail to recognize the spiritual significance of the land, Tom reveres the physical landscape and turns to it for his spiritual well-being. The novel thus provides Owens a vehicle for delineating his Native American character's search for identity in a culture dominated by European American attitudes toward the land. Indeed, Tom's establishing an identity depends on his ability to integrate into his consciousness both physical and spiritual aspects of the landscape.

To achieve this integration, Tom must blend into a unified whole various Salish concepts of a human's relation to nature and the hard fact of the changing landscape of his home; at the same time he must learn from—but finally resist—predominant mainstream American attitudes toward the land. As Owens suggests in *Other Destinies*, much Native American fiction shows the reader "the possibility of recovering a centered sense of personal identity and significance" that is "entirely dependent upon a coherent cultural identity" (*Other* 19, 20). Despite his uncle's teachings, Tom initially lacks any coherent understanding of Salish culture, and his visions (or vision quests) often seem to fail. In the face of these apparent stumbling blocks, Tom's education must include lessons in change and in the adaptation of nonlocal points of view. Owens seems to suggest that mere reliance on an incomplete understanding of traditional Salish attitudes toward the land will no longer suffice in the contemporary Pacific Northwest. Owens in this sense takes as his challenge creating a community for Tom and the reader; Tom must develop an ethic that will sustain a landscape that includes not only geological and biological, but also geographical and geopolitical characteristics of a particular region.

In *Other Destinies* Owens maintains that "Native Americans have fought an unending battle to affirm their own identities, to resist the metamorphoses insisted upon by European intruders and to hold to that certainty of self that is passed on through tribal traditions and oral literature" (*Other* 21). In *Wolfsong*, Owens problematizes Tom's achieving that "certainty of self" not only by creating gaps in his knowledge of his own Salish culture but also by presenting the prevalence of European American influence and describing the changes that such influence brings about. As a result,

there exists a tension between Tom's compulsion to resist the metamorphoses of the dominant culture and his need to recognize and even adapt to changes in the landscape. This tension is indicative of the complexity and difficulty of Tom's position. In short, in his search for a centered sense of self, Tom must learn that his reverence for the landscape demands that he go through purification rituals, that he free himself from limiting stereotypes, that he remember the stories, and that he recognize the need to understand change. In the context of stereotypes, Owens suggests that even if one establishes that a particular group practices a land ethic, it is probably inappropriate to generalize that practice to Native Americans of other regions and other nations. Nonetheless, both as a novelist and as a critic, Owens himself declares that the ecological perspective important for him is in a way typical of many Indian writers. As he explains in the introduction to *Other Destinies*, "Native American writers are offering a way of looking at the world that is new to Western culture. It is a holistic, ecological perspective, one that places essential value upon the totality of existence, making humanity equal to all elements but superior to none and giving humankind crucial responsibility for the care of the world we inhabit" (*Other* 29).

Owens relies heavily on his personal knowledge of the Cascade Mountains to establish the parameters of responsibility. This knowledge is evident in his carefully establishing verity through the place-names of mountains, towns, and rivers. For the most part, he changes the names only of what is most immediate: what can be read as the Snohomish River and Snohomish tribe he changes to Stehemish (his fictional name for a Salish tribe). What must be the town of Darrington he calls Forks (a name he borrows from the Olympic Peninsula). The actual White Chuck Mountain he calls White Horse. Other place-names are actual: the towns of Arlington and Everett, for example. The Stillaguamish and Sauk Rivers are real and accurately described, as are most of the mountains: Eldorado, Dome, Spider, and Rainier. (Like the town of Forks, Blue Mountain seems to be borrowed from the Olympic Peninsula.) Tom asserts the importance of names as he looks at the peaks: "he wondered what the old, real names were for those mountains. His uncle must have not known either, for he had never mentioned any of those names. And without them he must have felt mute, without the proper language for prayer" (*Wolfsong* 94). Tom

does know the name of the most important of these mountains, Dakobed (Glacier Peak). He recognizes it as "the white mountain, the center, the great mother" (*Wolfsong* 92). According to Ella Clark, *Dahkobeed*, or variations of that word, is a Salish name for Mount Rainier, but the word can also refer to any great white (snow-capped) mountain (Clark 27–28).

In his chapter on Owens's first novel, Chris LaLonde offers an important additional insight into significance of the way Owens uses place-names, mixing actual and fictional. It serves three important functions: it "calls into question the dominant culture's map of the world"; it "makes explicit the power of the imagination" in the healing process, of both individual and place; and it serves to distort the reader's sense of the real, and it thereby demands the reader's attention, which forces us, as readers, to have "a special instrument that resolves the distortion or change our position and perspective on the object" (LaLonde 23, 24). The sum effect, according to LaLonde, is that Owens asks "his reader to reconsider the world and how he or she perceives it" (LaLonde 25). This is especially important, of course, in a situation in which the degradation of the environment has become an accepted and culturally acceptable commonplace. It is time, suggests Owens, that Americans reconsider how they perceive and interact with the landscape.

In addition to insisting on the importance of a solid knowledge of the mountains, Owens maintains that to understand and appreciate a given American Indian novel, readers must "take the trouble to learn something" about the particular culture and mythology of the writer and characters (Owens, *Other* 29). It is clear that Owens himself, of Choctaw and Cherokee descent, took care to learn about Salish culture in writing *Wolfsong*, for at the heart of the novel is a particular physical and cultural landscape that is Snohomish. Take, for example, the role of hunting, a crucial part of a land ethic. As with any hunting or fishing community, the coastal Salish—like Northwest Coast Indians in general—recognize a critical, reciprocal relationship between the fish and the fisher specifically, and generally between the human and the nonhuman community. Hence the Snohomish (Stehemish in the novel) can be seen to abide by moral principles that promote such a respectful and spiritual relationship. For the coastal Salish, human life is not privileged over nonhuman life; indeed, these people might even think themselves to be essentially inferior to some of the

world's nonhuman inhabitants, and for their survival they acknowledge their dependence on the good will of other creatures.

Owens suggests that an indigenous land ethic distinguishes a Salish worldview, for example, from the European American worldview. For the Salish, natural beings such as deer responded voluntarily to the hunter's needs. As J. Baird Callicott, among others, argues, the animals responded "[a]s persons." Such an understanding of the nonhuman animal's behavior infers a social contract or social order, and "social interaction is limited by . . . behavioral restraints" (Callicott 194). These restraints, or rules of conduct, make up a system of ethics. This notion of rules of conduct is very like Momaday's assertion in "An American Land Ethic" that "it is possible to formulate an ethical idea of the land—a notion of what it is and must be in our daily lives" (Momaday, *Man* 48). Momaday also writes of "reciprocal approbation" in which a person "invests himself in the landscape, and at the same time incorporates the landscape into his own most fundamental experience" (Momaday, "Native" 80). In *Wolfsong* this reciprocal approbation or interdependence is evident in the way a hunted deer is perceived to give itself to Tom and his uncle; and the way the hunters acknowledge their debt through a ritualistic response, the offering of bones to the water. According to Philip Drucker in his study *Indians of the Northwest Coast*, "to return all the salmon bones to the water was one of the procedures believed to be essential. . . . This concept was extended to many other species" (Drucker 155). Clearly for Tom and his uncle, this concept was extended to the deer.

Even though he tries to hold onto such traditional beliefs for himself, Tom returns from the university to a society in which only the human being has value, importance, or standing—and only the non-Indian human at that. In the logging town Tom comes home to, humans and mainstream human enterprises take precedence over all else: over the old growth pine and redwood, over the sacred cedars, over the endangered falcons, over the returning wolves, over the beleaguered salmon, over the independent loggers, over the small-time waterworks operator, and over the local Native American inhabitants of Forks. This devaluing of the nonhuman and of the human Other runs counter to what Tom deems estimable. He feels the severed link with physical place that alienates the human from the spirits. Unlike the others at the University of California at Santa Barbara,

in another example, Tom could sense the sacred burial ground on which the campus was built: "Nobody else seemed to notice it, but I could feel those people there all the time. They didn't want anybody there" (*Wolfsong* 64). Although he is not the only one to suffer from it, Tom alone seems to recognize the change that has brought about this alienation, and hence his suffering is acute.

Tom's uncle anticipates the nephew's suffering when he tells him that his going away to school will be okay because it will not change him. Unlike his brother, for example, Tom will be able to withstand the changes others try to force on him; he won't forget who he is: "You'll go there and then you'll come back. It won't be like it used to be. Nothing will change" (*Wolfsong* 88). The uncle's reference is to his own going away and his never being quite able to adjust after returning. It will be different for Tom, prophesizes the uncle. Tom will return to Forks still able to maintain his sense of relationship to the land and the culture. Tom does indeed return from the university in Santa Barbara with his land ethic intact. But meanwhile the world around him has changed, and thus Tom's uncle is reduced to taking potshots at bulldozers. Despite his independence, Tom's knowledge of Salish culture is too fragmented to provide him completely with what he needs. He doesn't know the "real" names of the mountains, for example, nor does he believe he or his uncle has the "proper language for prayer" (*Wolfsong* 94). When wondering about eating the inside of bark pulp, he "wished he'd paid more attention when his uncle had explained it" (*Wolfsong* 84). In relation to Dakobed, he "tried to feel what it had meant to his tribe," but it is not clear that he knows what meaning it had for his ancestors. Sometimes he feels "alone, cut off, a distant speck in the whirling world" (*Wolfsong* 163). As his friend McBride tells him, he is a " 'one man tribe' " (*Wolfsong* 195).

Such moments suggest the problematic nature of Tom's recovering Salish culture. Although connection with tribal culture is important, mere association with a Salish past is not enough to provide the young man a clearly centered sense of self. The complexity is not surprising, however; both his uncle and his mother warn him that finding his identity will not be easy. His uncle tells him that "sometimes it doesn't go right . . . bad things can happen." And his mother warns him that " 'the changes are too much. There are things no one knows any more' " (*Wolfsong* 86, 78).

From listening to the stories, Tom learns "that a spirit was a difficult thing that might wander away all year and leave its possessor stumbling in darkness only to swoop suddenly down upon the man. . . . A spirit . . . might leave abruptly for someone with greater need. There were many spirits and many ways and times to find one" (*Wolfsong* 85). Tom does recognize both that he needs a spirit helper and that that helper might be elusive.

As the world around Forks continues to change, Tom must retain what is valuable from his uncle's and his mother's teachings, and he must continue to learn about the land; but at the same time he must learn from the changes around him. Tom's education in change begins when his uncle tells him that it is safe to go away to school but that he has to return home to get some important lessons. Bob McBride offers lessons in change by the ease with which he marries different cultures and by his insistence that he and Tom are brothers because both are descendants of Salish speaking tribes. To Tom, his friend suddenly "seemed more Indian in some ways with his seven-eighths white ancestry" (*Wolfsong* 18, 183). At a sweat in Canada, Tom comes to understand that "it was all Indian, but it wasn't familiar" (*Wolfsong* 189). Tom's former girlfriend, Karen, offers additional lessons in change when she says "you come back and you expect things to just be the same, like nothing ever was supposed to change. . . . things change." Then she adds, "There's nothing for you in this valley any more" (*Wolfsong* 177, 178). Another lesson in change comes just after Tom has again seemed to fail to complete his "vision quest" by walking on the bottom of the lake he calls Image. Martin Girder (the ranger) tells him that you "have to figure that it's all your country now, just like it's all mine. White and Indian don't matter, just like tribal boundaries don't matter any more" (*Wolfsong* 173). Karen has prepared him for the notion that his home is no longer limited to this single valley, for in a conversation with her Tom realizes that "[d]own there where the rivers came together and split again, *it wasn't his home anymore*, not earth-blood and rock, cedar red like blood, rivers cutting at the old ones beneath their stones, a pulse through the mountains like the heartbeat drum at one of the spirit dances" (*Wolfsong* 143; emphasis added). By suffering through moments like these, by acknowledging that things change, Tom slowly claims an identity that is at once part of and separate from the particular landscape that shapes that identity.

Tom's uncle also suffers, and seems to have lost the power to heal himself. The power of healing is lost to him perhaps because he is alone in his resistance to the loggers and miners. His encounter with the spirit dancers shortly before his death suggests his loss and loneliness. As Marian Smith writes in *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, "[a]lone in the woods, [a person] became a mere parody of a human being. Such cases are sometimes described as having even lost the power of human speech" (M. Smith 16). Tom's uncle recalls having lost his voice when he first returned from the Indian school of his boyhood. His haphazard and futile shooting at the machines, moreover, is almost a parody, demonstrating the helplessness of one individual against the open-pit mining enterprise. We remember that he frowns "as the dancers began moving again in the undergrowth, swaying and stepping, back and forth." Later he sees them "come out into the spaces between the trees and weave and step." He sees the spirits, and he hears the voices, but he does not seem to understand. At this moment, he is cognizant enough to think of his nephew and to wonder whether "he had taught the boy enough" (*Wolfsong* 1, 5). There are two specific points to be made here. One is that Owens shows the old man to be without control as mediator between the worlds of spirit and flesh. He is unable to understand the voices he hears—and his lack of control is associated with European American interruption: "In the old days, a man might be thrown away by the people. Today, it seemed sometimes that the whole world was being thrown away by the whites" (*Wolfsong* 6). A second point is that the nephew, Tom, has been given a great responsibility. To take on that responsibility, however, he must have proper initiation and education. As his mother tells him, he needs to know " 'things no one can teach [him] now. . . . It's too late' " (*Wolfsong* 78). Tom's responsibility is all the more challenging in that he must take over where not even his uncle was in control; he must learn much for himself.

The uncle's situation implies the fragility, vulnerability, and precariousness of Snohomish culture. Tom's situation, in contrast, is more hopeful—" 'Tom won't end up like his uncle. . . . He's too smart,' " says Bayard (*Wolfsong* 199)—but he must maintain control; he must manage as mediator between physical and spiritual worlds. According to Northwest Coast tradition, humans play an important role as mediators between different spirit realms. The human being is endowed with insight and knowledge about

how the world operates but can tap into the spirit power only through proper ritual action. According to Pamela Amoss in her study of Salish spirit dancing, for instance, bringing on spirit powers requires vision experience, which in turn requires a susceptible condition such as sorrow. Ritual purification—"achieved through bathing, fasting, sexual abstinence, and sleep deprivation"—prepares one to receive a vision (Amoss 53). According to Claudia Lewis in *Indian Families of the Northwest Coast*, "[c]entral to the concept of spirit power was the belief that the animal world and the natural world were infused with supernatural powers whose aid and direction human beings could seek, through the vision quest. Rigorous preparation for an encounter with the animal . . . which was to direct the choice of occupation and become one's helper, began in childhood. . . . No one could expect great success without a spirit helper" (C. Lewis 22). Tom's spiritual helper is the wolf. It is clearly Tom who is meant to be hounded (and helped) by the wolf spirit. It is to him that his uncle—who himself was previously called Wolf—makes this promise: " 'I'm willing this spirit to you, Tommy. . . . That's one way we can do it' " (*Wolfsong* 36–37). Again according to Amoss, "[m]ost people now receive a vision that was already in the family. The tutelary of some deceased relative lingers, hoping to come to someone in the family. It picks a suitable candidate and begins to trouble him" (Amoss 53). Even as a child, Tom could "almost believe he could see the wolf spirit, *staka'yu*" (*Wolfsong* 34). The first night he is back in Forks he does see the wolf, and this wolf spirit accompanies him throughout the novel, and finally leads him along the mountaintop (*Wolfsong* 248–49). By the novel's conclusion, Tom has become a successful mediator in that through him the spirit and physical worlds merge.

One of the messages of the novel is that the separation of spirit and physical place is typical of white culture and that therefore white settlers are at least partially to blame for the degeneration of Snohomish culture that Tom is challenged to retain. In contemplating Christianity, for instance, Tom asks a pointed question: "How could you separate the spirit from life and call it religion?" (*Wolfsong* 51). This separation, typical of members of Western culture, parallels the separation of human and nonhuman life. As Tom's uncle explains it, " '[w]hen our people lived here long ago, before the white folks came, there wasn't any wilderness and there wasn't any wild animals . . . it took white people to make the country and the animals

wild'" (*Wolfsong* 81). Like Standing Bear and Erdrich, Owens calls into question Western assumptions about wilderness and the wild. In his essay "Burning the Shelter," Owens writes that as a forest ranger working for the National Parks system, he was caught in a bind. Because of a "wilderness area" regulation prohibiting human structures, he had just burned a mountain shelter that predated the designation of the area as a wilderness. Owens's narrator in this essay has a similar realization: "Gradually, almost painfully, I began to understand that what I called 'wilderness' was an absurdity, nothing more than a figment of the European imagination. An 'absolute fake'" (*Mixedblood* 216). In echoing Standing Bear and in calling the very notion of wilderness into question, Owens does more than suggest that his readers carefully consider and reconsider the power of language to have effects beyond the immediate verbal act. Language ultimately affects our understanding of who we are and where we live. According to critic David Brande, Owens's work "addresses fundamental and controversial questions about Native identity and (heterogeneous and dynamic) tribal orientations toward nonhuman nature. That is, alongside Owens's critique of the idea of wilderness is a discussion of the epistemological and political status of Native representations of Native attitudes toward the land" (Brande 196). In *Wolfsong* Tom recognizes the land not as wilderness but as a place where everything is "connected so carefully like the strands of a spider's web" (*Wolfsong* 82). According to Northwest Coast tradition, human beings cannot perceive the true nature of spirits, but they can see them animated when they dance or sing. Tom perceives the wolf, which to him is not a wild animal but a beneficent spirit, perhaps his own uncle. Tom does not draw a line between physical and spiritual or between organic and inorganic. Tracing the roots of hemlock, fir, and cedar, for example, he discovers an enormous rootwad: "There was no demarcation, no place where he could say, 'This is alive, this is not'" (*Wolfsong* 83). Nor is he willing to say this is wolf, this is not wolf; this is spirit, this is not; this is uncle, this is not. For Tom, they are simultaneously each an individual yet each an inseparable part of a whole.

Owens also addresses the traditional "sweat" that Tom's friend McBride takes him to. Tom "was surprised at how good he felt after the pain. He felt clean." The sweat is important, in part, because it allows Tom at least momentarily to feel that "suddenly he understood it all" (*Wolfsong* 193,

191). The sweat is important also because immediately afterward, Tom's host, Aaron Medicine, articulates a promise of hope in the future, in the lands extending north through Canada. Aaron also hints at the possibility of a return. The sweat has been good for the body and the mind, but it does not alter the fact of the open-pit mine and the destruction of the mountain that that mine entails.

In addition to going through a sweat and traditional Salish ritual preparations, Tom must also go through a personal awakening. As he listens to Karen at one point, he notices that the waterfalls "unmake themselves. . . . They are their own cancellation. . . . [T]he waterfall didn't really exist, had ceased to exist in the same moment it had begun" (*Wolfsong* 136–37). Like the waterfall, Tom continually remakes himself. And he has trouble claiming an identity because, like the waterfall, his Indian self ceases to exist as soon as it is created; it keeps remaking itself. In this remaking, Tom must repeatedly challenge typical stereotypes of American Indians that can keep him from knowing himself. He asks himself, at one point, what it would have been like to have been a "real Indian" (*Wolfsong* 37). That he is stuck between the stereotype and the actual is evident when he contemplates his ancestors: an "image of a plains warrior padding silently through the forest came to him and he smiled. Books and movies seldom showed Indians who looked like the Salish people of these mountains. Short, dark people dressed in woven cedar bark weren't as exciting as Sioux warriors in eagle-feather headdresses on horseback, the sun always setting behind them" (*Wolfsong* 83). Tom smiles to himself and moves beyond this image, but he must perpetually be on his guard against letting such a stereotype mold his own sense of self. He consciously contrasts himself with a Plains Indian of school histories and popular stereotypes: "he felt as if he were descended from some madman's dream. Indians rode spotted horses over golden plains after buffalo. They lived in tipis, not in cedar-slab houses. . . . He was unreal" (*Wolfsong* 54–55). At other times Tom seems to have a clearer sense of the complexities and multiple identities of Indians: "at the urban powwows would be guys like the kid from Laguna Pueblo who sang and drummed and, between songs, listened to heavy metal on his earphones. That was what real Indians were like" (*Wolfsong* 127). Such instances demonstrate Owens's awareness of stereotypes imposed on American Indians, and such instances also demonstrate his awareness (through

the character Tom) of how those stereotypes affect not only non-Indian attitudes but also how they affect American Indians themselves. In order to know himself, Tom must therefore come to terms with the stereotypes that have been imposed on him as an American Indian and to some extent attempt to define him.

Owens delineates the steps or stages of Tom's spiritual regeneration and his reintegration into tribal culture with references to several typically Salish customs, but he also contrasts these tribally specific methods of reintegration with some stereotypical notions of how an Indian might attempt to achieve spiritual equilibrium or might cope with a sense of cultural alienation. Tom entertains, but quickly dismisses, the idea of drinking as a means of achieving comfort. After being fired from Vern's logging crew, he buys a bottle of liquor, but after only a few sips he empties the rest into the river, noticing at that moment that the fish (like himself?) are "like arrows in the deep water, waiting for the strength to return" (*Wolfsong* 201). After his mother's death, he thinks, briefly, that "it would be nice . . . to sit beside Jimmy and drink and watch the electric sign above the bar," but he doesn't do it (*Wolfsong* 208). Thus Tom, the down-and-out Indian, as it were, refuses to turn to alcohol as a means of escape or response, as stereotype would have him do.

For Tom—who unlike his brother Jimmy, feels the necessity of staying out of the bar and of recognizing and retaining a Native American identity—remembering and valuing a specific, personal past is important. He must recall his uncle's stories. As his mother tells him, "'[y]ou've come a long way, and you must go a long way back to find out who you are'" (*Wolfsong* 78); he must find a centered sense of self, which means he must come to terms with and overcome the stereotypes that threaten to limit him and define him as something other than what he is. He must separate himself from his own stereotype of Indians on horseback. He must believe in the possibility of a relationship between a guardian spirit and a human being—not because that is what Indians do, but because it is what he does, because it is what he believes and what his uncle believed. Through his responsibility to the landscape, he must also be one who can hear the spirits and thus serve as mediator between the human and the spirit realms.

Finding an identity ultimately involves Tom's integrating spirit and place. His search demands that he move through the literal landscape,

but at the same time it demands that that place be at once both physical and spiritual. Tom must recognize that physical place is alive, that the earth, the rock, the tree, the river are all animate, and in this recognition he must acknowledge the spiritual significance embodied in physical place. As is supposed to be typical of coastal Salish (according to Ella Clark, for instance), Tom is able to recognize that "everything had life or spirit; the earth, the rocks, the trees, ferns, as well as birds and animals, even the hail which fell from the sky, had a spirit and a language and song of its own" (Clark 7). In the mountains, among the huckleberry bushes and small trees, near the lake called Image—in these places, Tom "listened to the stories" and "came to understand that the power of a singer was a subtle thing . . . a complex web that drew upon all the forces of the mountains and brought them to a single focus like perfect silence" (*Wolfsong* 85). In the novel, the embodiment of that complex web is the wolf spirit in that it is at once both of nature and of spirit; and the wolf spirit is realized through story.

In *Other Destinies*, Owens maintains that "Native American writing represents an attempt to recover identity and authenticity by invoking and incorporating the world from within the oral tradition—the reality of myth and ceremony" (*Other* 11). Owens thus provides a key to appreciating elements of his own fiction. Specifically, he keys Tom's reliance on his uncle's stories, and thereby offers a sense of the communal nature of an oral tradition that includes not only Tom and his uncle but also the narrator and finally the reader as well. As Tom is hiking in the mountains with a storm approaching, he recalls a story that his uncle had told him:

> As the sun climbed over the Cascades, two women were rolling hail. All day they played, rolling the hail from east to west, sunrise to sunset. Their laughter was thunder, and when they loved a man he had power, his wounds cooled and healed by the hail sweeping through the mountains from sunrise to sunset, east to west. [Tom] heard the hail soften and watched through the branches as the snow began to obscure the meadows. (*Wolfsong* 216)

Although at the beginning of this story there is a clear demarcation between Tom's "real" situation on the mountainside and the situation of the story, by the end, the story and the "real" fuse. It is as if Tom first "hears" the storm from within the story, obscuring the boundaries between what is the "real" hail and the "storied," as the storm itself obscures the mountain

meadows. Here Owens emphasizes and authenticates the "reality of the myth," and at the same time, by including this story within a story, he draws the reader into the equation.

In addition to authenticating the reality of myth for Tom within the narrative, Owens's own story (the novel itself) demonstrates for the reader the importance of storytelling as a provisional strategy that is subject to ongoing revision of culture, politics, and place. Owens insists that story, place, and identity are linked. Because of the stories of his ancestors, Tom believes (as Pamela Amoss finds typical of the Salish) that "powerful spirits lived on the tops of the highest peaks" (Amoss 8). He also knows that Dakobed is at the spiritual center of his existence: "They had woven it over thousands of years into their stories, telling themselves who they were and would always be in relation to the beautiful peak. Through their relationship with the mountain, they knew they were significant, a people to be reckoned with upon the earth. . . . This much his uncle's stories, and his mother's stories, had made clear" (*Wolfsong* 92–93). Through the power of storytelling and through his relationship with the mountain—even though his knowledge of Salish culture may not be complete—Tom becomes a person to be reckoned with in at least two senses. Virtually everyone in the valley recognizes a power that Tom embodies, a power similar to the power they recognized in his uncle. Tom is the person whom J. D. Hill, the wealthiest man in the valley, tries to win over; Tom is the one the bullies try to frighten off; he is the one his coworkers try to intimidate, if not actually kill. Yes, he must be reckoned with. In another sense, Tom gains power by blowing up the water tank, but in his act resides a troubling irony, similar to the irony of Fleur's cutting her own trees at the end of *Tracks*. Otherwise reduced to powerlessness in a culture that ignores an identity such as his, Tom resorts to the trickster act, as Chris LaLonde has called it (LaLonde 39), of destroying the water tank and killing J. D. Hill. As is typical of trickster acts, this one gets beyond the trickster's control. With the loss of control comes a certain loss of power, and the act is ironic in that it forces Tom to flee, to abandon the very mountain he seeks to protect. Tom nevertheless also attains a certain power, both as a trickster figure and as one who undergoes a ritual purification. His uncle has told him that "'[w]hen you are pure, maybe a spirit will find you and you will be a singer, a man with power'" (*Wolfsong* 217). The spirit does indeed find him as he flees

toward Canada, yet for this flight to be anything less than mere resignation, Tom must embody hope as he runs across the mountains. For that hope, he must rely on his belief in the power of the spirit, belief in an endless wilderness, and belief in the power to return.

From the opening pages of the novel, Owens prepares the reader for Tom's journey toward Canada, where he is ultimately headed. When he first arrives in Arlington in the novel's opening pages, Owens notes that the bus continues toward Canada. Tom often notices the peaks stretching toward Canada, and he and McBride make a trip to Canada where they enter a sweat and where they are told that from where they are the forests stretch northward forever. Aaron Medicine describes the forest this way: " 'Those trees are the beginning. . . . You can go into those trees and start walking and you never have to stop. . . . There are grizzlies in those woods, man, realbears. And sometimes at night out there you hear wolves. They don't know it, man, but we're coming back. All of us. Every damned one of us' " (*Wolfsong* 193–94). In these ways, Owens clearly foreshadows Tom's flight toward and hopeful escape into Canada, and he also intimates the possibility of his eventual return. Like the wolf, Tom carries with him the potential to come back to his home whether or not it turns out to be one particular town or another.

Of all the foreshadowing suggesting that in traveling to Canada Tom can regain his power, his uncle's promise perhaps offers the most hope. Before Tom leaves for the university, his uncle makes a promise: " 'When you come back we'll go for a long walk. When you come back we'll walk clear over the mountains to Lake Chelan the way the old ones did, and I'll tell you all the stories. Maybe we'll walk all the way to Canada, and I'll teach you all them things you ain't learned yet' " (*Wolfsong* 88). In a sense, his uncle—Wolf—does indeed walk with him, does indeed lead him, does indeed tell him the stories. After climbing the ice wall, Tom turns "to run just as the wolf began to call again, and this time it kept growing, louder and louder and spinning in ever-widening circles through the thin air until it was deafening and seemed a part of the air he breathed" (*Wolfsong* 249). Tom can be seen to escape with his life, but in so doing he must forsake the particular place. It is clearly ironic that passive resistance to the open-pit mine and the destruction of the mountain is futile, while active resistance, inspired by an awareness of the spiritual importance of the land, results in

the forced flight from the very land that makes possible such spirituality in the first place.

The picture of Tom loping across the alpine snow toward Canada and freedom certainly is a complex image, juxtaposing what Tom is apparently leaving behind with what he might be running toward. Behind him is the fact that his uncle and mother have died. The identity of his brother Jimmy is essentially lost to him and to the Snohomish. His girlfriend Karen has left him. Copper mining will go on regardless of opposition, and apparently Tom must abandon, at least temporarily, the mountains that give him strength. Despite these losses, however, he does retain and follow his mother's advice, he remembers his uncle's stories and teachings, and he cherishes a clear vision of the spirits. He does possess the wolfsong. These he takes with him to the mountains and woods that suggest infinite possibility. Tom imagines "waves of mountain ranges, black timber rising to snow and ice, wave after wave of mountains and deep valleys stretching far north across Canada and into the unknown territory of Alaska. . . . then still more wilderness, on and on forever" (*Wolfsong* 207–08). What appears ironic in the spirit's becoming part of him at the moment he abandons the particular place from whence the spirit comes is thus actually indicative of Tom's spiritual growth. He and the wolf spirit have found each other.

The novel's conclusion thus suggests that we the readers can see Tom as finally successful. He succeeds in that he survives to carry the wolfsong through the woods. He ultimately refuses a culture imposed on him from outside the landscape. He embraces both the allusive wolf and the very literal landscape; together they suggest the vast promise of the northern woods. And like the wolf, Tom embodies the hope of an eventual forceful return. In his migration northward, he retains the potential of achieving mythical proportions. Like Momaday's spirit-character Ko-sahn, Tom fuses spirit and place. As Momaday writes in "An American Land Ethic," there "was no distinction between the individual and the racial experience, even as there was none between the mythical and the historical. Both were realized . . . in the one memory, and that [one memory] was of the land" (Momaday, *Man* 48). For Tom, the spirit and the physical landscape become indistinguishable; the wolf spirit is as elemental as the air he breathes. If there is finally no distinction between landscape and spirit, Tom must be seen as one to be reckoned with on the earth. And our job as readers

is to come away with the recognition that we too must acknowledge our need for a respectful even reverential land ethic, that we too must see and hear the dance and song of spirits in the land, that in the air around us we too must hear the wolfsong or, depending on where and when, the voice of spider or bear or panther or water or thunder. We too must listen.

> The Indian has assumed a deep ethical regard for the earth and sky, a reverence for the natural world that is antipodal to that strange tenet of modern civilization that seemingly has it that man must destroy his environment.
>
> *–N. Scott Momaday, "A First American Views His Land"*

CHAPTER SEVEN

"From the Land Itself"
Momaday's Language, Landscape, and Land Ethic

At roughly the same time Owens's character Tom Joseph climbs into Amel's truck for a ride home to Forks at the beginning of *Wolfsong*, N. Scott Momaday, according to his own recollection in an essay called "Navajo Place Names," picks up a hitchhiker on his way between Gallup, New Mexico, and Kayenta, Arizona, to the northwest. As they drive along, Momaday discovers that this hitchhiker, a young Navajo man, knows the Navajo names for the places they see as they drive. Momaday remembers his amazement at his traveling companion's knowledge: "He was eminently familiar with the places that defined him." According to Momaday, at least in part because of that knowledge of place-names, "this man was indeed *at home*" (*Man* 126; Momaday's emphasis). Momaday's experience with language becomes part of his formulation of the necessary human relationship with the land and with the sacred: "Where language touches the earth, there is the holy, there is the sacred," he declares in the same essay (*Man* 124). In the very first paragraph, in fact, Momaday outlines his philosophy of connections, as it were. Through language, through names and naming, the earth is understood to be sacred, and "names and being

are indivisible"; and our being, our existence, who we are as humans, depends on where we are, what places or spaces we occupy: "places and points among which we are born, grow old, and die. There is in this simple cartology the idea of odyssey. And in odyssey there is story" (*Man* 124). Through this progression, as it were, Momaday touches on the elements that underlie much of his writing, much of his attitude toward the human connection with and necessary attitude toward the land.

In the essay "A First American Views His Land," Momaday posits the argument that as a result of their long tenure in the land on the North American continent, Native Americans have developed a spiritual and moral relationship with the land that was unknown, according to Momaday, to Pleistocene hunters and that remains essentially unknown to non-Indian Americans today. Momaday contrasts an early bison hunter with a hunter of the central forest millennia later to argue that the latter, by about 1500, "has fitted himself far more precisely into the patterns of the wilderness than did his ancient predecessor. . . . In principle, if not in name, this [modern] man is a conservationist" (*Man* 32). From this example Momaday draws his conclusion, stated as a thesis in the essay: "These two hunting sketches are far less important in themselves than is the long distance between them, the whole possibility within the dimension of time. I believe that in that interim, there grew up in the mind of man an idea of the land as sacred" (*Man* 32). Momaday then refers to several contemporary examples of Native Americans' understandings of their relationships with and responsibilities toward the land to make the argument that there is indeed "an intimate, vital link between the earth and himself, a link that implies an intricate network of rights and responsibilities" (*Man* 31–32).

Perhaps at the expense of historical accuracy, Momaday romanticizes an aboriginal hunter in what is now northern New Mexico at the very end of the Pleistocene to make his point that this very primitive man, this ancient hunter, traipses through a "virgin wilderness," has no understanding of the sun, whose "coming and going are inexorable" to him, and for whom a "relationship to the land has not yet become a moral equation" (*Man* 31). By citing several specific examples, Momaday then argues that unlike their predecessors, contemporary "American Indian[s have] a unique investment in the American landscape" (*Man* 33). According to Momaday, one knows from the words of a Navajo ceremonial song, for example, that the

way Navajos comprehend "the earth and air is surely a matter of morality" (*Man* 35). Momaday characterizes his Kiowa grandfather Mammedaty as one who "fitted his mind and will and spirit to the land. . . . He could not have conceived of living apart from the land," and Momaday describes the burial of his grandmother as "the translation of the woman into the landscape" (*Man* 35, 36). Similarly, by virtue of his position in the community, the cacique at Jemez Pueblo "is himself the translation of man, every man, into the landscape" (*Man* 37). And finally, Momaday refers to a hundred-year-old woman storyteller whose "voice proceeded from the land itself" (*Man* 38). As these several examples demonstrate, Momaday insists that Native Americans enjoy a relationship with the earth and natural environment that is unique, different from non-Indian relationships: "In our society as a whole we conceive of the land in terms of ownership and use. It is a lifeless medium of exchange . . . But this way of thinking of the land is alien to the Indian. His cultural intelligence is opposed to these concepts" (*Man* 40). At several points throughout "A First American Views His Land," Momaday reiterates this perspective, reminding his readers of the American Indians' long tenure in the land and insisting that such a "simple and obvious trust is one of the most important realities of the Indian world, and it is integral in the Indian mind and spirit" (*Man* 33). Moreover, he adds, with this trust comes a sense of morality: the human relationship to the land has indeed become a moral equation.

Toward the end of the essay, Momaday makes two very important points with regard to his representation of an American Indian's view of his land. First, he argues that "in the Native American world view is the conviction that the earth is vital, that there is a spiritual dimension to it," and thus it follows logically, according to Momaday, that "there are ethical imperatives" concerning a human's relationship with the landscape, hence the moral equation. Second, Momaday repeats that the "Native American is someone who thinks of himself, imagines himself in a particular way. By virtue of his experience, his idea of himself comprehends his relationship to the land." And, he adds, "the quality of this imagining is determined as well by racial and cultural experience. The Native American's attitudes toward this landscape have been formulated over a long period of time, a span that reaches back to the end of the Ice Age. The land, *this* land, is secure in his racial memory" (*Man* 39; Momaday's emphasis). In such

ways Momaday makes the connection between self and landscape explicit, and as he does so he differentiates between an American Indian's and a European American's ways of thinking of the self in relationship to the physical world.

I quote Momaday at such length through these examples because it seems that in this essay in particular he succinctly articulates a philosophy of a Native American attitude to the land that appears again and again to different degrees throughout his writings, writings both before and after the publication of this essay in 1976. Here he makes clear what he sees as a distinction between Native American and non-Native attitudes, as he also insists on the spiritual and therefore moral relationship Native Americans hold toward the land. At the same time, of course, he writes about a racial memory gained through cultural experience that, he asserts, is also unique to Native Americans. With these contexts in mind, then, this chapter turns to an investigation of several of Momaday's other writings, both fiction and essay, to suggest how he elaborates his philosophy of the importance of and links between Native Americans, language, the sacred, and the land.

Momaday contends that in contemporary Western culture people have unfortunately lost the art or the ability to truly appreciate language, and this loss, he infers, parallels the loss of an appreciation or an ethical regard for the landscape, especially since language to some extent makes place. Momaday maintains that "language is sacred," and in an interview with William T. Morgan Jr. he elaborates on this point: "In our daily lives we tend . . . to disregard language in that sense, we don't try to understand it in terms of the sacred. We think of it as communication rather than spiritual expression or a vehicle for the sacred" (Schubnell, *Conversations*, 46–47). In Momaday's sense, contemporary non-Indian Americans lack any connection with the sacredness of the landscape, and they therefore have essentially nothing of importance to say. In any culture that values an oral tradition, as Momaday maintains his does, this failing implies a disuse and misuse of language, and further, because language is at the center of a person's concept of self, the failure reflects on one's identity. "We are what we imagine ourselves to be," he writes in "A First American Views His Land" (*Man* 39), and that imagining is done through language, and both imagination and language derive from and remain responsible to the land. In his preface to the collection *The Man Made of Words*, he writes that "[l]anguage is the stuff of the imagination. The imagination is the creative

aspect of language. . . . It enables us to create and re-create ourselves in story and literature" (*Man* 2). In essay after essay, Momaday asserts that humans create themselves through imagination and through language just as language can make the land whole. But the sense of humans' relationship with the earth is also a result of imagination. In "An American Land Ethic," for instance, he writes of a land ethic as "an act of the imagination" (*Man* 47).

In that Momaday argues for a very close relationship, an indivisible, reciprocal interdependence, between imagination, language, storytelling, and a sense of place, it comes as no surprise that he couches his discussion of "An American Land Ethic" in an essay about storytelling. He describes how he has nearly finished the book *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (has completed all but the epilogue) when he is inspired to write about the 1833 meteor shower marked in the Kiowa calendar. That celestial event "has become part of the racial memory" of the Kiowas, he declares (*Man* 42). Here Momaday turns to a recollection of the old Kiowa woman Ko-sahn: " 'The living memory,' I wrote, 'and the verbal tradition which transcends it, were brought together for me once and for all in the person of Ko-sahn' " (*Man* 42–43). Momaday makes the connection between memory and land by suggesting that for Ko-sahn there was no distinction between "the mythical and the historical. Both were realized for her in the one memory, and that was of the land" (*Man* 48). Because of her long tenure in the land (she lived to be over one hundred years old), she had a profound knowledge of the land from which she drew her strength. "In Ko-sahn and in her people," concludes Momaday, "we have always had the example of a deep, ethical regard for the land" (*Man* 49). As reported in his description of the creative process in the essay "An American Land Ethic," underlying the history, myth, and autobiography of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is thus the story of Ko-sahn's specifically, and the Kiowas' generally, close relationship with the landscape.

According to Elaine Jahner, place and landscape are of critical importance for Momaday in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*: the idea "belongs both to time and place; for *where* one is shapes a fundamental relationship between self and land that, in turn, leads to a particular way of formulating that relationship in language that corresponds to the matching of self and place" (Jahner 165; Jahner's emphasis). Other than the introduction to *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Momaday's most explicit statement concerning

a human's necessary relationship with the earth comes late in the book, just before the epilogue. Recalling the story of the woman buried in the beautiful dress, Momaday reflects—in a passage that has been often quoted and reproduced—that even though no one knows exactly where her grave is, looking to the east from his grandmother's house, he is sure that "the woman is buried somewhere within the range of [his] vision" (*Way* 82). This belief inspires him to contemplate the culture and landscape of his homeland near Carnegie, Oklahoma, and its importance to him: "Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it" (*Way* 83). The idea of dwelling has of course at least two meanings here. Momaday encourages one to dwell on, to think or wonder about, the land one occupies, but the word also denotes, and Momaday commands, that one live on the land as well. In this context, then, to contemplate or think about the land one lives on is to imagine it, to know the history of it, and ultimately to have a spiritual and therefore moral sense of it. To dwell on the land is thus to be there both physically and spiritually (as well as morally). It is to appreciate the history of the place, both culturally and geologically; it is to know the land's story and to be able to tell that story.

As well as making the point concerning the necessary relationship with the land, Momaday uses the account of his experience of coming toward Rainy Mountain, both literally and figuratively, to suggest again that a "holy regard" resides with Native Americans and remains missing from non-Indians. He notes that on the prairie one can appreciate the sun as a deity: "My grandmother had a reverence for the sun, a certain holy regard which now is all but gone out of mankind" (*Way* 8). With this holy regard comes an understanding and an appreciation that exists only through language and story, where the "living memory and the verbal tradition" come together (*Way* 86). This fusion of storytelling and describing a land ethic is quintessential Momaday. In his introduction to his section "Essays in Place" in *The Man Made of Words* he writes that the "storyteller's place within the context of language must include both a geographical and mythic frame of reference" (*Man* 112). As Momaday makes clear in the essay "Revisiting Sacred Ground," for the man made of words language is

of course central to his identity and identity at the same time depends on place: "I am who I am because I have been there" (*Man* 118). For Momaday that "there," that place, is in this instance Devils Tower, the geological feature from which Momaday himself gets his Kiowa name, appropriately enough, and the place about which he writes (and repeats again in *House Made of Dawn* as well as in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*): " 'There are things in nature that engender an awful quiet in the heart of man; Devil's [*sic*] Tower is one of them' " (*Man* 122). Momaday maintains that one's identity is intimately and reciprocally involved with the landscape, that "our humanity must consist in part in the ethical as well as in the practical ideal of preservation. . . . We Americans need . . . to imagine who and what we are with respect to the earth and sky. I am talking about an act of the imagination, essentially, and the concept of an American land ethic" (*Man* 47). Momaday insists that one's spiritual self is intimately and reciprocally involved with the landscape. One's being has everything to do with one's relationship with the land: "I believe that it is possible to formulate an ethical idea of the land . . . and I believe moreover that it is absolutely necessary to do so" (*Man* 48). Interestingly, however, despite his insistence on this power of the imagination, despite the moving description of Ko-sahn appearing to him as he was finishing his book, despite his insistence that "none lives apart from the land entirely" (*Man* 47), and despite his call for a moral relationship with the land, Momaday remains vague about what exactly he means by a land ethic. He does, however, articulate this much: a land ethic is necessary for survival, it is remembered in the blood, it is an act of the imagination, and it is something that the Kiowa people (unlike European Americans) had and to some extent still have. But from the essay "An American Land Ethic" itself, it is not quite clear what that ethical regard is, nor is it clear how an ethical regard might manifest itself.

By looking at Momaday's fiction as well as at other essays, one can perhaps come to a better or a fuller understanding of what he means by a land ethic. In the 1976 essay "Native American Attitudes toward the Environment," he again makes explicit the connection between the self and the landscape. In the same language he uses in "A First American Views His Land," he writes that the American Indian is "someone who thinks of himself in a particular way and his idea comprehends his relationship to the physical world" ("Native" 80). And in other instances, other contexts,

Momaday suggests that the attitude he is referring to is in some ways specific to American Indians. In an early essay, first published as "Personal Reflections," he distinguishes between two ways of seeing the world: "I believe there is a fundamental dichotomy at the center of these relations, past and present. The Indian and the white man perceive the world in different ways" (*Man* 50). As a result of this dichotomy, contemporary American Indians have lost (and non-Indians lack) the necessary connection to the land. In "An American Land Ethic" Momaday writes that we have become uprooted from the soil: "We have become disoriented" (*Man* 47). The way back to a rediscovery, he suggests, is through the imagination insofar as it is through the imagination and the power of words that one captures, recaptures, or recognizes the sacredness of the land. There is an obvious reciprocity here. For Momaday, the land is always already sacred, and imagination and language make that sanctity real for the human being.

In the introduction to his collection of stories and poems *In the Presence of the Sun*, Momaday writes that he has "been called 'the man made of words.' " It is a phrase that he himself coined in connection with a Kiowa folktale, "The Arrowmaker," a story his father often repeated to him when he was a boy. The adult Momaday writes that it "is an identity that pleases me. In a sense, a real sense, my life has been composed of words. Reading and writing, talking, telling stories, listening, remembering, and thinking . . . have been the cornerstones of my existence. Words inform the element in which I live my daily life" (*In the Presence* xviii). As words are of fundamental importance to his sense of identity, it follows that names also form an important part of his character: "I believe that a man is his name. The name and the existence are indivisible" (Schubnell, *Conversations* 85). Momaday clarifies this point in an interview, and consequently can be seen to maintain that the more deeply involved one is in language, the more fully one exists. Momaday's Kiowa name, Tsoai-talee (Rock-Tree Boy), refers to the Kiowa story concerning Devils Tower, and thus his name connects him both literally and figuratively to the landscape. He explains the significance of his name: "My Kiowa name, Tsoai-talee, means 'Rock Tree Boy,' and it is of course, associated immediately with the rock tree, what is now called Devils Tower. It is the sacred place in Kiowa tradition, and it is the place where the boy turned into a bear. I identify with that boy. I have for many years" (Woodard 13). The place-name comes from

a Kiowa story, a story that imbues the place with sacredness, and Momaday's name comes from the place. His name and the story (imagination and language) are thus linked. He becomes, in ways, the story itself.

In addition to identifying with the place of Devils Tower from which he gets his name, Momaday identifies with the bear that is inextricably linked to the story of the Rock Tree. In the story, a boy turns into a bear, and according to the Kiowa version, chases his sisters, who climb the rock tree to safety. With his claws the bear/boy scratches the grooves into the tower of rock. Momaday describes his relationship with the bear inside him: "I have struggled with my bear power through those years. I think I have come to terms with it. I feel good about it" (Woodard 13). Just how central and appropriate this naming is becomes apparent when Momaday talks about the bear's role in *The Ancient Child*. The novel, he says, "is about the boy who turns into a bear, and in a sense I am writing about myself. I'm not writing an autobiography, but I am imagining a story that proceeds out of my own experience of the bear power. It is full of magic. But sometimes the bear is very difficult" (Woodard 13). In the sense that his bear identity grows out of a specific landscape, that of Devils Tower, landscape in general can be seen to be crucial to Momaday's sense of self. Thus in addition to defining ourselves through language, argues Momaday, we must recognize the influence of landscape on our being, "who and what we are with respect to the earth and sky" (*Man* 47). As noted above, according to Momaday, a person's relationship to the landscape seems to be central to the identity that that person imagines for him- or herself. In a culture that devalues the spoken word—that misuses the word or uses the word exclusively for the trivial, that uses the word for communication rather than communion—the word itself is lost, and hence the self is lost. But as long as there is land and as long as there is imagination, there remains the possibility of regaining an awareness of self.

Momaday has a sense of self that is derived in part from the geophysical place of Devils Tower in northeastern Wyoming and from the Kiowa story that is associated with that place, but he also acknowledges his debt to the landscape of the southwest where he grew up. He describes how his childhood was shaped by the landscape of New Mexico, declaring that "[y]ou have to spend time in a place and come to know it as it changes in the hours of the day and in the seasons of the year. And if you put yourself into it,

it absorbs you and you come to know it and depend upon it in numerous ways. In spiritual as well as physical ways" (Woodard 50). Momaday offers another example of how place is important to him: "I identify very strongly with places where I have lived, where I have been, where I have invested some part of my being." He acknowledges his indebtedness to the landscape: "That equation between man and nature or between writer and place—I don't think there is a relationship that is more important than that" (Woodard 67). Thus in addition to Devils Tower, Rainy Mountain and the area around Lawton, Oklahoma, are important to Momaday's sense of self. Also important is the Jemez valley, where he spent much of his youth and where he sets his first novel, *House Made of Dawn.*

If Momaday maintains that the idea of place, the idea of the physical world is a critical component to one's understanding of one's self, it should come as no surprise that we find the same theme of the fusion of language, place, and identity based on place in *House Made of Dawn.* Lawrence Evers refers to two important traditions as they relate to the novel: the Native American relationship with the land and the author's special regard for language. According to Evers, a "sense of place derives from the perception of a culturally imposed symbolic order on a particular physical topography." From this landscape one draws strength and authority. Restoration and harmony for the Navajo come through "Chantway rituals," argues Evers; thus for Momaday the word becomes of fundamental importance not only in healing, but also in perceiving the landscape (Evers 114, 116). As several other critics have suggested, one cannot read the novel *House Made of Dawn* without recognizing the central importance of the landscape. At least one interpretation, in fact, suggests that Abel's healing ultimately depends on his gaining an understanding of his relationship with the earth specifically. According to Robert Nelson, for example, Abel must come to terms with the snake medicine. He must balance the sky medicine (symbolized by or embodied in the eagle) with the earth medicine (symbolized by the rattlesnake) in order to achieve his healing. Abel's final acceptance, or understanding of the earth medicine, his coming to terms with *culebra*, the snake, ultimately enables his recovery. According to Nelson, Abel's disease results from "his unwillingness to be held by the land, that is, his resistance to the snake spirit of the place" (Nelson 48), and his healing thus depends on his ability to reintegrate with the land, to accept the snake spirit. Through encounters with manifestations of that "spirit of the place"

embodied in Angela, the Albino, and Martinez, Nelson contends, Abel is ultimately able to participate in the Dawn run and "in his act of running he confirms the wholeness of the life of this place, a wholeness he earlier violated by dividing it into its eagle and snake aspects." Nelson's argument is finally that the landscape is absolutely central to a person's well-being. Abel's vision is "informed by the landscape" (Nelson 88), and as a result his physical and mental health, his sense of who he is in relation to his grandfather, the rest of his pueblo, his whole being, depends on his relationship to the land.

"*The canyon is a ladder to the plain*," writes Momaday in a passage in which he describes some of the animals that inhabit the valley, "foxes, and bobcats and mountain lions . . . the lizard and the frog," for example; and hawks, and especially eagles: "all things there are related simply by having existence in the perfect vision of a bird." And all these creatures "have tenure in the land." Indigenous animals stand in stark contrast to domestic animals whose "dust is borne away in the wind." Surprisingly perhaps, "man, too, has tenure in the land" writes Momaday. The people who originally came to the Pueblos that is. Non-Indian people, the latecomers, however, Momaday infers, do not have this tenure in the land: "Man came down the ladder to the plain a long time ago." And the caves and mesas they came from still have evidence of the people's having lived there, "as if the prehistoric civilization had gone out among the hills for a little while and would return; and then everything would be restored to an older age, and time would have returned upon itself and a bad dream of invasion and change would have been dissolved in an hour before the dawn" (*House* 50; Momaday's emphasis). In this uniquely political passage in the novel, a passage which vaguely recalls the Ghost Dance belief in the possibility of rolling back time to a precontact era, Momaday suggests once again that the non-Natives, the invaders and colonizers, lack tenure in the land and therefore suffer a dislocation. Such a dislocation from the land results in the evils, the effects of the "bad dream," of colonization.

Despite the seemingly obvious importance Momaday puts on the land in an American Indian's life, he nevertheless refuses any easy attribution of Indian as environmentalist. His depiction of his characters' places in relation to the natural world is indeed nuanced. In the opening pages of *House Made of Dawn*, for instance, he describes the waste perpetrated by Abel's grandfather, the same man who is responsible for teaching Abel so

much about his Jemez culture and traditions. On his way to pick up his grandson, Francisco checks a snare he has set and discovers that he has trapped a sparrow and not a colorful bird as he had hoped. Francisco, as a kiva elder, was disappointed not to have snared a mountain bluebird or a tanager, for he needed such bright red or blue feathers for ceremonial use, and without the proper feathers the ceremonies would be compromised. But my emphasis here is on Francisco's devaluing the life of the less colorful bird. Because he has no use for sparrow feathers, he "drew the reed from the sand and cut loose the horsehair from the sparrow's feet. The bird fell into the water and was carried away in the current" (*House* 6). Although it is contextually understandable, this apparent wastefulness, this apparent lack of regard for the unwanted bird, is suggestive of the complexity of Francisco's character, and is contrasted in other places with Momaday's insistence that American Indians do indeed know and practice a land ethic.

Regardless of this depiction of waste, the novelist does point out a fundamental difference between a Native American relationship with the landscape and a non-Indian's. He presents Milly's (non-Indian) father as one who lacks the ability to understand and appreciate the land or the human connection to the land. Milly tells Abel the story of her father's fight against the earth: "*The earth where we lived was hard and dry and brick red, and Daddy plowed and planted and watered the land. . . . and at last began to hate the land, began to think of it as some kind of enemy, his own very personal and deadly enemy. I remember he came in from the fields at evening, having been beaten by the land, and he said nothing. He never said anything*" (*House* 108; Momaday's emphasis). Here again Momaday fuses language and land. Like Abel, whose inability to speak is emblematic of his initial distance and alienation from the land, Milly's father, who hates the land he works for his living, is mute. Without language, suggests Momaday through Milly's narrative, the land remains foreign, alien, an enemy; it is language and story that imbues land with meaning and yet without land there can be no story. Milly's recollection about her father's relationship with the land makes manifest, by negative example, this symbiosis.

Like her taciturn father, Milly is in a way also mute until she meets Abel and discovers she can speak to him. Before that, she "had been in Los Angeles four years, and in all that time she had not talked to anyone. . . . [S]he

did not talk to them, tell them anything that mattered in the least" (*House* 107). Whereas her father worked the land he hated and was thus mute and in a sense figuratively landless, Milly is literally landless in that she has been uprooted from her home. Indicative of how genuinely without place she is, she does not reveal where her home had been. Neither Ben nor the reader knows anything more specific than that she "was raised on a farm somewhere" (*House* 144). Abel and Ben, in contrast, are both very closely associated with specific places: Abel with the Jemez Valley and the surrounding mountains to which he will return, and Ben with Navajo Country in Arizona, specifically Cornfields, Chambers, and the trading post at Wide Ruins, for example. As Ben realizes of his home, when you are there, "*you were there where you wanted to be*" (*House* 149; Momaday's emphasis). Through depictions of such disparate degrees of alienation from the physical environment, Momaday thus makes evident what he sees as the wide gaps and fundamental differences between Indian and non-Indian understandings of and relationships with the land.

Momaday juxtaposes Milly's story about the land with Tosamah's second sermon (recounted as the prologue to *The Way to Rainy Mountain*), a story the landscape inspires: "A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma. . . . For my people it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain." The place has a name, it becomes sacred, and it inspires story. In this sense, the juxtaposition of Milly's and Tosamah's stories further suggests that (unlike Milly's father) the Native Americans Tosamah, Priest of the Sun, and Aho, Tosamah's grandmother (in the fiction of the novel), do recognize the landscape, its sacredness, and human dependence on it. As the sermon makes clear, moreover, there exists a symbiotic relationship between the land and the people. Momaday, through his character Tosamah, describes this relationship in terms of the power the land has over the imagination: "At the slightest elevation you can see to the end of the world. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun" (*House* 112–13). Aided by his imagination, Tosamah then tells the story of his grandmother and of the Kiowa migration from the headwaters of the Yellowstone River in the Rocky Mountains, across the Plains, pausing at Devils Tower, and coming to settle near Rainy Mountain.

As Tosamah recounts his own pilgrimage from Montana to Oklahoma (which was Momaday's as well), he too pauses at Devils Tower, that huge, thousand-foot-high scarred stone that appears to rise out of the earth, isolate and pure. It is one of those few and special "things in nature" that engenders "an awful quiet in the heart of man"; "Man must account for it. He must never fail to explain such a thing to himself, or else he is estranged forever from the universe. Two centuries ago, because they could not do otherwise, the Kiowas made a legend at the base of the rock" (*House* 115). Although Momaday insists that such a natural wonder must inspire awe, engender quiet in the heart, the observer must nevertheless find a way to articulate its power and majesty. In this sense place can be seen to inspire story, yet without story, once again, place has no meaning to human beings. Without story corresponding to and accompanying being in place, humans are estranged forever from the universe. At the same time, to speak of the land is to revere it. The legend that the Kiowas felt compelled to tell was of the rock's origins and power, a creation story. From " 'that moment, and so long as the legend lives, the Kiowas have kinsmen in the night sky' " (*House* 116). Without those relatives in the sky, the people on earth would be estranged, implies Momaday.

In his next novel, *The Ancient Child* (1989), published some twenty-one years after *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday returns to Devils Tower. Like its predecessor, this novel is in some ways about a man separated from his culture and from the land. One strand of the plot, or the convergences of the two main plots, is the story of Set returning to place, finding himself, realizing his identity and how intimately that self is tied to the landscape. So intimately is he tied, in fact, that the novel takes a sort of surreal turn when Set is transformed into his "real self." In discussing the novel with Charles Woodard, Momaday explained that "Most people cannot recover nature. . . . But this boy [Set] is an exception. He turns into a bear; that means he reconstructs that link with nature" (Woodard 13). Applying a sort of psychogeographical theory to Momaday's *The Ancient Child*, Susan Roberson argues that "place identity is an integral part of the self." Self-identity, she suggests, "involves an ecology that 'includes a society, a past, and a place' " (Roberson 33). In this context we can see that *place* provides one not only with a sense of self, but also with a sense of history and a sense of community. If this sounds familiar, it is because it helps to explain

the tripartite structure of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, where self, community, and history take shape according to place. For the Kiowas, as for Momaday the individual, the story of the migration toward the geographical Rainy Mountain in southwestern Oklahoma fuses place, history, and society. In Momaday's narrative, they become inseparable. In his essay "I Wonder What Will Happen to the Land," Momaday writes that "*Events take place*. . . . Events do indeed take place; they bear meaning in relation to the things around them. And I, too, happen to take place, each day of my life in my environment. I exist in a landscape, and my existence is indivisible with the land" (*Man* 187; Momaday's emphasis). As we have seen, Momaday maintains that "place is created where language touches land" (*Man* 124); and moreover, according to Matthias Schubnell, "Momaday believes that the Indian relation to the world is based on the power of the word" (Schubnell, *N. Scott Momaday* 116).

Because Momaday believes that one's identity depends on one's relationship to where one is, it is fitting that *The Ancient Child* should thus have as a primary plot device Set's return to place: "In the clearing, he belonged. Everything there was familiar to him" (*Ancient* 312). It is also significant that Set's transformation—in which he becomes a bear, in which he assumes his true identity, so to speak—takes place on the very spot at which the author himself received his name, the place from which, in a sense, Momaday became who he has ever since imagined himself to be. The place is Tsoai, Rock-Tree (Devils Tower), and the man is named Tsoai-talee, Rock-Tree Boy. Place is thus at the center of Momaday's sense of self and at the center of his life and fiction. By imaginatively combining that sense of self with an intense sense of place, Momaday has created who he is. On the importance of naming, Momaday uses his own experience as an example. The old man "Pohd-lohk affirmed the whole life of the child in a name saying: Now you are, Tsoai-talee." Thus Momaday's receiving his name and his being, his existence, coincide and his existence becomes, in a sense, inseparable from place, in this instance a very specific place. Momaday contends as much in his interview with Woodard, reiterating this idea of the importance of naming: "Naming is very complicated, and a sacred business. . . . I have the idea that names and being are indivisible. When you name something, you confer being upon it at the same time" (Woodard 88). In *The Way to Rainy Mountain* Momaday contends that the

importance of name transcends death and retains its importance: "A man's name is his own. . . . Kiowas would not speak the name of a dead man. To do so would have been disrespectful and dishonest. The dead take their names with them out of the world" (*Way* 33). Language and place are at the center of Momaday's sense of self, and at the center of his fiction. Language and place are at the center of his life and at the center of his imagination. Thus to honor language is to protect place, which is to honor and protect the self. Where language touches earth, there is the sacred, yes, and there too—where language touches earth—is the self.

For Momaday place is a fundamental concept in our lives. As he states emphatically in "Navajo Place Names," "[w]e know who we are (and where we are) only with reference to the things around us" (*Man* 124). If nothing unique or defined (nothing named) surrounds us, we know no home, no place, and we thus have no identity, no self. In Momaday's ideal world, it is (or would be) different; he knows "that the essential things of the world and the universe are in place, *in place.* They are fixed forever in their names" (*Man* 126; Momaday's emphasis). Perhaps this is what Momaday suggests when he writes that we know where we are only in certain contexts: "One effect of the technological revolution has been to uproot us from the soil. We have become disoriented, I believe; we have suffered a kind of psychic dislocation of ourselves in time and space. We may be perfectly sure of where we are in relation to the supermarket and the next coffee break, but I doubt that any of us knows where he is in relation to the stars and to the solstices" (*Man* 47–48). Momaday insists on the importance of the physical universe. One must also recognize a temporal element that is larger than his or her wristwatch, a celestial calendar of some sort, something like those kinspeople in the night sky who are honored by the Kiowas. In this sense, it is the story that imbues the land (and the heavens) with sacred meaning. It is through language that humans can understand the sacredness of the land. This belief in a close relationship between language and land is not necessarily unique to Momaday, nor limited to the Kiowas or Navajos. In a recent article for *Sierra* magazine, Nancy Lord argues for the significance of land and language among speakers of an Athabaskan-speaking Alaskan tribe, for example: "As I learned a little Dena'ina I began to see its profound dependence on locations. . . . I understood with new clarity how the language was confirming the landscape, the landscape shaping the lan-

guage" (Lord 46). Lord's contention might be seen to support Momaday's argument concerning the close relation between language and place, but Momaday does not seem to be interested in empirical verification. His is much more a personal or ideological contention. According to the author, the storyteller creates place, but as Momaday tells Woodard, for someone else, for another who might set foot on Rainy Mountain, "it may not be as I have described it" (Woodard 68).

If Momaday has in common with his Native American contemporaries beliefs about the connection between language and natural fact, he also has these beliefs in common with some writers of mainstream American literature. The special reverence for nature that he describes as especially evident among Native American cultures, in fact, is not all that different from an understanding that Ralph Waldo Emerson—as well as other American Romantics, whom Momaday studied in graduate school at Berkeley—expresses in his essay *Nature* (1836): "Words are signs of natural facts," writes Emerson: "Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts" (Emerson 31). In the essay "Sacred Places," in comparison, Momaday asserts that "[l]anguage and the sacred are indivisible. The earth and all its appearances and expressions exist in names and stories and prayers and spells" (*Man* 114). Although Schubnell makes a case for Momaday's intellectual debt to Frederick Tuckerman, "who remained detached from the Transcendental interpretation of the universe," Momaday does seem to share some ideas with Emerson (Schubnell, *N. Scott Momaday* 77). Emerson argues, for instance, that "[e]very word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance" (Emerson 31). Momaday certainly is interested in the intimate connection between the word and material place; he seems especially interested in the reciprocal relationship between the two. He acknowledges that the "earth was here before [he] was," but he maintains that the "writer creates place" (Woodard 67). If Momaday does not share Emerson's idealism per se, he does at least most certainly share his belief in the importance of human impression on the landscape.

Like Emerson too, Momaday is interested in the child's response to the landscape, to the sacred, and to language. But here Momaday differs I think significantly, and breaks with his Romantic mentors. For Emerson, the notion that the sun, his metaphor for understanding and seeing nature,

"shines into the eye and heart of the child" is a way to explain that the adult needs to see like a child (Emerson 23). For Momaday, in contrast, the child he refers to represents the future. Momaday looks forward. In the afterword to "The Morality of Indian Hating" (truly an afterword in that he wrote it some thirty-four years after he wrote the essay itself), Momaday considers again the question of identity, this time as it relates to children: "It is imperative that the Indian defines himself, that he finds the strength to do so, that he refuses to let others define him. Children are at greatest risk. We, Native Americans in particular, but all of us, need to restore the sacred to our children" (*Man* 76). In the essay "Sacred Places," Momaday comes back to this issue of identity as it relates to place and the importance of instilling in children a sense of the sacred. The two short paragraphs are worth quoting at length:

> The sacred places of North America are threatened, even as the sacred earth is threatened. . . . We must . . . take steps to preserve the spiritual centers of our earth, those places that are invested with the dreams of our ancestors and the well-being of our children.
>
> It is good for us, too, to touch the earth. We, and our children, need the chance to walk the sacred earth, this final abiding place of all that lives. We must preserve our sacred places in order to know our place in time, our reach to eternity. (*Man* 116–17)

Momaday's call for maintaining a land ethic and for preserving sacred places is clear even if the details of how a land ethic may manifest itself remain somewhat vague. It is undeniably crucial for Momaday that we understand the importance of the connection between story and land, and that we appreciate the sacredness of land with which language imbues it. Preserving and honoring sacred places is critical. Through place one knows oneself, one's relation to others and to the natural world, and thus those places must be honored and protected. And finally, insists Momaday, we must share our knowledge of and appreciation for the sacredness of land with the children. Like Louise Erdrich at the end of *The Blue Jay's Dance*, Momaday looks both to the past and to the future in explaining his connection to the land. Through the past we can understand ways in which the land is important to us; looking to the children and the future, we can understand the importance it will and must retain.

> Sacred places are the foundation of all other beliefs and practices because they represent the presence of the sacred in our lives. They properly inform us that we are not larger than nature and that we have responsibilities to the rest of the natural world that transcend our own personal desires and wishes.
> – *Vine Deloria Jr.,* God Is Red: A Native View

CHAPTER EIGHT

Living with the Land

Deloria, Landscape, and Religion

In the same year that N. Scott Momaday won the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *House Made of Dawn*, 1969, Vine Deloria Jr. published his first and perhaps still best-known book, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. He opens his manifesto by challenging easy stereotypes, declaring that the mainstream American public feels that it knows all about the American Indian: "People can tell just by looking at us what we want, what should be done to help us, how we feel, and what a 'real' Indian is really like" (*Custer* 1). A few pages later he writes sardonically that all it takes to understand Indians "is a trip through Arizona or New Mexico, watching a documentary on TV, having known *one* in the service, or having read a popular book on *them*" (*Custer* 5; Deloria's emphasis). Later in the same chapter, however, Deloria makes his contribution, listing the books that to his "way of thinking give a good idea of the intangible sense of reality that pervades the Indian people" (*Custer* 16): Hal Borland's *When the Legends Die*, Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man*, and Dan Cushman's *Stay Away, Joe*. In his treatise on American Indian religion, *God Is Red*, first published four years later, he includes Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* as a successful novel "of modern Indian life," and he reassesses his opinion of *Little Big Man*, writing that given its time period it "could hardly be said to

relate to the nature of contemporary Indian life" (*God Is Red* 40). As part of his explication of the tendency to stereotype American Indians, Deloria maintains that "if you count on the unpredictability of Indian people, you will never be sorry" (*Custer* 1). It is thus evident that Deloria both decries ways in which mainstream Americans stereotype Indians and does some stereotyping of his own.

Deloria—the late professor of political science and Native American studies, lawyer, and scholar of religion—has long served as a spokesperson for contemporary American Indians, and thus his pronouncements carry enormous weight. Roger Dunsmore contends that as far as Deloria goes, "[n]o other voice . . . [has] the edge to bite through the layers of soft tissue, through the stereotypes, myths, and outright lies, to the bone, to the bone marrow, of Indian affairs" (Dunsmore 411). According to Robert Warrior, Deloria is "the leading contemporary American Indian intellectual figure. His sometimes biting, always insightful and incisive commentaries on the United States and Indian America have impacted the shape of both federal Indian policy and Indian self-understanding" (Warrior xiv). In contrast to such high praise, in his 1985 overview *Native American Literature*, Andrew Wiget states that Deloria made "sweeping generalizations" that "rested on factual inaccuracies or doubtful premises." But in reference to Deloria's ideas, even Wiget acknowledges that "it seemed enough that they [those ideas] communicated contemporary attitudes and realities with vigor and energy" (Wiget, *Native* 21). Commenting on Deloria's work, Herbert T. Hoover offers a similar assessment, reporting that no other Native American author "has contributed so greatly to trans-cultural communication." But further, "the strength of [Deloria's] contributions comes not from the quality of the history he wrote but through the verve of his rhetoric" (Hoover 27). Deloria certainly does demonstrate vigor and energy, both in his challenge to the stereotypes and in his contributions to a literature of Native American thought and belief.

Others are a little more generous. Articulating the extent of Deloria's influence on himself and fellow anthropologists, Murray L. Wax writes that "[w]e realize that he has seen deeply into our heads and hearts and is trying desperately to enlarge our restricted vision." In this tribute to the debt he owes Deloria, Wax also notes that "Deloria has emerged as one of the most powerful political journalists of our time" (Wax 50, 52). In her essay

"Growing Up on Deloria," anthropologist Elizabeth S. Grobsmith writes that "Deloria's impact on our discipline has been such that working with any ethnic or cultural group now reflects a different protocol than before. Our actions have changed, and the assumptions that underlay them have changed as well" (Grobsmith 45). High praise indeed from anthropologists for a man who wrote that "Indians have been cursed above all other people in history. Indians have anthropologists" (*Custer* 78).

In a quite different realm, an additional indication and acknowledgement of Deloria's popular and pervasive appeal is evident from Susan Power's reference to the Standing Rock Sioux spokesperson in her 1994 novel *The Grass Dancer*. In a scene set in 1977, Frank Pipe, one of the Sioux high school students on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota, asks Jeanette, his non-Indian high school teacher, to discard her James Fenimore Cooper novels as a means of introducing her Sioux students to Native Americans:

> Frank cleared his throat. "We were wondering." He looked behind him, seemed to find what he needed, and turned back to face his teacher. "Instead of this stuff, could you read some of that Vine Deloria?"
>
> Jeanette picked up her pen and wrote the name on a tablet. "Now who is that?" she asked sweetly.
>
> Frank looked directly into her eyes for the first time. "He's our cousin," he told her. (Power 58–59)

Deloria does not come up by name again in the novel, but his presence is duly noted in this early chapter. Although the students may prefer Deloria only because he is a "cousin," Susan Power nevertheless suggests that he holds sway over reservation high school students. Hers is an important comment on his reputation and widespread popularity. Though some (like Wiget) have challenged Deloria on the basis of his occasional, somewhat sweeping generalizations, he has commanded a response and certainly an audience for his speculations.

In light of Deloria's popularity and pervasive influence, his defiance of stereotypes, and his adamant insistence on a Native American land ethic, my intention in this chapter is in part to trace the way Deloria conceives of the physical landscape (of place) as a part of Native American religious belief systems and to contemplate how his conceptions of the land and

the sacred play an important role in a larger context. In this larger context, it is important to reiterate Robert Warrior's contention that Deloria has significantly influenced "Indian self-understanding" (Warrior xiv). In *God Is Red* (1973), revised and expanded with the added subtitle *A Native View of Religion* (1993), Deloria writes about a Supreme Court decision in which the justices refused to acknowledge the sanctity of Native American sacred sites: "This lack of understanding highlights the great gulf that exists between traditional Western thinking about religion and the Indian perspective. It is the difference between individual conscience and commitment (Western) and communal tradition (Indian)" (*God Is Red: Native* 270). And two years later, in the book *Red Earth, White Lies* (1995), Deloria argues that "[w]hile it may appear that Indians are adopting the values and practices of American culture, in the field of human knowledge . . . there is still a tremendous gap between the beliefs and the practices of both whites and Indians." Later in the same work he writes, with some humor, that "the Indians knew wild animals considerably better than non-Indians and would have recognized a bear when they saw one" (*Red* 15, 148). Perhaps most succinctly, certainly most categorically, Deloria delineates the difference between Indian and non-Indian attitudes toward and treatment of the land in a passage in *We Talk, You Listen*: "The Indian lived with his land. *The white man destroyed his land. He destroyed the planet earth*" (*We* 186; Deloria's emphasis). Deloria articulates and thereby even reifies a distinction between Native American and non-Native traditions and belief systems, and he has thus been instrumental in suggesting a connection between those belief systems and a specific Native American land ethic.

Both Robert Warrior and Rosemary Radford Ruether discuss Deloria's insistence on the connection between land and religion, but neither pursues or develops this connection in their subsequent discussions. In *Tribal Secrets*, a study of Deloria and John Joseph Mathews in the context of American Indian intellectual traditions, Robert Warrior points out that Deloria's "fundamental questions throughout *God Is Red* derive from what Deloria sees as Christianity's lack of a relationship to the land. . . . He argues that ecological, political, and spiritual crises . . . are a result of the misguided attempt to separate humanity from the rest of creation" (Warrior 71). Warrior deftly presents Deloria's critique of Christianity, but he does not go into depth in his investigation of the importance of the land connection. Sim-

ilarly, Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that according to Deloria, the "Christian view of historical 'man' also translates into ecocide" (Ruether 250). Ruether then turns to discussions of Deloria's views of time, historical eschatology, and personal immortality. Neither Ruether nor Warrior pursues Deloria's discussions of religion and the land specifically. In a review of the second edition of *God Is Red*, Tod D. Swanson points out that according to Deloria, "Native religions begin and end with specific places." He quotes Deloria writing that " '[t]ribal religions are actually complexes of attitudes, beliefs, and practices fine-tuned to harmonize with the lands on which the people live' " (Swanson 161). But Swanson does not even mention in passing the chapter "Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility," a chapter Deloria adds to the revised edition of *God Is Red*, the edition that Swanson reviews. Although Roger Dunsmore offers no response to *God Is Red* in his brief overview of Deloria's life and work, he does argue that "Deloria shows us the nature of the huge rift between the spiritual 'owners' of the land, the Indians, and the political owners of the land, the whites—a rift which creates obvious turbulence throughout the political, moral, and psychic life of the nation" (Dunsmore 414). As is thus evident, several critics acknowledge Deloria's efforts to establish and articulate a land ethic, but none delves into or elaborates on the details of those efforts.

Deloria opens *God Is Red* by insisting that such a rift does indeed exist between Native and non-Native views. He acknowledges and clarifies his understanding of the relationship between Native Americans and the landscape: "At the bottom of everything, I believed then and continue to believe, is a religious view of the world that seeks to locate our species within the fabric of life that constitutes the natural world, the land and all its various forms of life. As long as Indians exist there will be conflict between the tribes and any group that carelessly despoils the land and the life it supports" (*God Is Red: Native* 1). As early as 1970 in *We Talk, You Listen*, Deloria articulates the importance of an Indian philosophy of the land: "The Indian lived with his land. He feared to destroy it by changing its natural shape because he realized that it was more than a useful tool for exploitation. It sustained all life, and without other forms of life, man himself could not survive" (*We* 186). Deloria thus promulgates the idea of a land ethic, an appreciation for the sacredness of land, or place that is somehow unique to American Indians. By insisting on a unique Native

American land ethic, Deloria also of course contributes to the very stereotypes he otherwise resists. What follows here, then, is a brief overview and investigation of the complexities of Deloria's theology concerning a Native American relationship with the land and nonhuman nature, and how those complexities disallow any easy stereotype.

In outlining the difference he perceives between Indian and non-Indian appreciation for the land as it relates to sacred tradition, belief, and worship, thereby insisting on the importance of place to Native Americans, Deloria insists that it "is not likely that non-Indians have had many of these kinds of religious experiences, particularly because most churches and synagogues have special rituals that are designed to cleanse the buildings so that their services can be held there untainted by the natural world. Non-Indians have simply not been on this continent very long; their families have rarely settled in one place for any period of time so that no profound relationship with the environment has been possible" (*God Is Red: Native* 274). Also in the context of the relatively short length of time non-Native people have been on the continent, he maintains that there is "probably not sufficient time for the non-Indian population to understand the meaning of sacred lands and incorporate the idea into their lives and practices" (*God Is Red: Native* 281). According to Deloria, "Indian tribes are communities in ways that are fundamentally different [from] other American communities and organizations. Tribal communities are wholly defined by the family relationships; the non-Indian communities are defined primarily by residence, by an arbitrary establishment of political jurisdiction, or by agreement with generally applicable sets of intellectual beliefs." In another such instance, Deloria writes that "[m]ost non-Indians see in tribal religions the experiences and reverence that are missing in their own heritage" (*God Is Red: Native* 270, 281). He makes this statement in the context of the several instances he enumerates where American Indian tribes are attempting to regain possession of sacred lands, lands that have been taken by the United States government. As does Momaday with the Kiowas, Deloria links many tribes to specific places: the Hopis to the Black Mesa area; the Navajos to Mount Taylor and Blanca Peak; the Apaches to Mount Graham; the Pueblo people to several sites sacred to specific groups, and "many tribes from Montana, the Dakotas, and Wyoming" to Medicine Wheel in Wyoming.

In addition to his generalizations about the differences between Indian and non-Indian attitudes toward and understandings of the land and nonhuman nature, Deloria makes generalizations about Native Americans themselves, generalizations that echo Momaday's contention that as an Indian person he has a memory in the blood about his Indian ancestry, about his culture, and about his Kiowa history. In the context of appreciating the sacredness of the land, Deloria asserts that "Indians who have never visited certain sacred sites nevertheless know of these places from the community knowledge, and they intuit this knowing to be an essential part of their being" (*God Is Red: Native* 271). One of the important aspects to be gleaned from such assertions is that Deloria articulates his understanding of a Native American appreciation for the sacredness of the landscape that, he argues and demonstrates, is missing by and large, if not altogether, from contemporary mainstream European American culture.

As is evident from such passages, despite his repeated challenges to the validity of stereotypes in other contexts, Deloria does indeed nevertheless insist on generalizing the (precontact) Native American as aware of the interdependence of human and landscape and thus careful to honor that landscape. A striking example of Deloria's concurrent resistance to stereotypes in general and to that of Indians as environmentalists in particular is apparent in something he suggests as part of his response to the essay collection *Indians and Anthropologists.* In discussing his contention that anthropology "is, and continues to be, a deeply colonial academic discipline," he writes that it "is totally disheartening to see Indians interviewed in the seemingly endless documentaries about the environment and find them telling us that the earth is our mother. The interviewer nods wisely, the Indian looks solemn, and the destruction continues" ("Conclusion" 213). Here is the gist: Deloria insists that American Indians do indeed perceive and respond to the land in ways significantly different from non-Indians, and yet he will not allow the sentimental palaver that passes for Indian wisdom or non-Indian acceptance of that wisdom. He maintains a belief system that demands intellectual commitment and rigor.

Although he insists on rigor, Deloria argues that the "land use philosophy of Indians is so utterly simple that it seems stupid to repeat it: man must live with other forms of life on the land and not destroy it" (*God Is Red: Native* 189). What seems so obvious and simple, however, is totally foreign,

according to Deloria, from the perspective of mainstream European American culture whose practitioners continue to destroy the environment—air quality and water quality, for example—at an ever-accelerating pace: "Without air to breathe, it is ridiculous to speak of progress, culture, civilization, or technology" states Deloria (*God Is Red: Native* 193). He also points out and laments that "non-Indians have engaged in the senseless killing of wildlife and utter destruction of plant life" (*God Is Red: Native* 274). Devastation of the landscape is in fact so much in European blood, suggests Deloria at the end of *Red Earth, White Lies*, that he can accuse Europeans of having "migrated up from Africa and engaged in a form of flora-cide on an unparalleled scale, dwarfing everything ever seen in human history until their descendants marched through Tennessee and Kentucky in the nineteenth century destroying forests" (*Red* 253). And European American descendants, insists Deloria, continue to severely compromise air and water quality. In the conclusion to *Indians and Anthropologists,* Deloria asks an important question: "Could the festivals by which people reestablished relationships with the natural world provide us with a vehicle for making our concern about the environment an actual change of behavior?" ("Conclusion" 220). The question clearly demonstrates the principle of activism that underpins many of his theological premises and postulates. And his work thereby becomes a call to action.

Even though as noted above Deloria deems the theology "utterly simple," he acquiesces to the fact that the same theology nevertheless becomes extremely complex in the context of contemporary, non-Indian America. In an interview in 1975, he states that "you can't talk about ecological law without grounding it in an extremely sophisticated theology, poetry or philosophy of human sensitivity" (McGraw 200). So much for the utterly simple. Indeed, rather than simple, states Deloria elsewhere, the "implications of this philosophy are very far-reaching" (*We* 189). Robert Warrior acknowledges and investigates the complexity of Deloria's thought in his discussion of *God Is Red*: "It is not in these reductive comparisons [of Christianity and various American Indian traditions] that we find Deloria's real strength. Rather, we find his most important analyses in the fundamental questions that lurk, in his estimation, behind traditional theological questions" (Warrior 71). The implications, in fact, require that humans actually, literally reorient themselves toward the land and nonhuman nature.

Deloria calls for a spiritual, legal, practical reorientation of Indians and non-Indians alike in their relationship with the land. In the context of the Sioux people who make a living from crafting ashtrays and decorative carvings from stone found at the sacred Pipestone Quarry in southwestern Minnesota, for instance, Deloria calls for an attitude change: "A major shift in focus is needed by traditional Sioux people to prepare to reconsecrate the quarry and return to the old ways of reverence" (*God Is Red: Native* 281). Deloria does not shy away from this call, even (or especially) in reference to the Sioux who have capitalized on non-Indian attitudes toward the land and the exploitative economies such attitudes foster.

Deloria makes explicit the point of the centrality of the land to any Native American worldview when he writes of what he sees as the role of anthropologists. When they begin in earnest "to speak critically to the shortcomings of their own society using the knowledge which they claim to have derived from observation of the tribal peoples, that will be a signal that something of real value is contained within the tribal context" ("Conclusion" 220–21). This reorientation is practical, but it is also fundamentally spiritual and thus has religious underpinnings. That is, Deloria fuses reverence for a supernatural power with reverence for nonhuman nature. In *God Is Red*, as in other writings, he focuses on Christianity and Indian religions with rational inquiry in an effort to articulate a religious truth. That truth is perhaps summed up in his insistence that humans recognize that "the sacredness of lands on which previous generations [both human and nonhuman generations] have lived and died is the foundation of all other sentiment" (*God Is Red: Native* 278). Such inquiry is ever more necessary, according to Deloria, because of the failure of Christianity and its theologians to appreciate the complex interdependence of man and nonhuman nature. Similarly, Deloria faults the U.S. government for failing to comprehend or acknowledge the fundamental differences in theology as well as the very different religious practices, especially in the context of practicing "their religion and conduct[ing] ceremonies at sacred sites on public lands" between Indians and non-Indians (*God Is Red: Native* 268). And as we have seen in the example of the Pipestone Quarry, this failure of understanding and appreciation is not unique to non-Indians. All people, Deloria implies, must embrace an "Indian" attitude toward the land.

In his chapter "Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility" in the revised

version of *God Is Red*, Deloria distinguishes between the sacred and the secular, arguing that sacred places "are the foundation of all other beliefs and practices because they represent the presence of the sacred in our lives. They properly inform us that we are not larger than nature [that we are a part of that large and intricate community] and that we have responsibilities to the rest of the natural world that transcend our own personal desires and wishes. This lesson must be learned by each generation" (*God Is Red: Native* 281). In this chapter he outlines four major categories of what constitutes a sacred site. In each case he refers to Western, primarily Judeo-Christian, tradition to make his argument clear to a primarily non-Indian audience. The four categories consist of the following: 1) lands or sites where human actions have somehow made the land sacred; his example is Gettysburg; 2) lands on which humans have witnessed a supernatural moment or had an experience; his example is the Judeo-Christian reference to the stones Joshua piled to mark where the people crossed the Jordan; 3) lands or sites where a divine being has made itself manifest without reference to human action; his example is the burning bush that Moses witnesses; and 4) newly sacred lands. Deloria maintains that because "there are higher spiritual powers who can communicate with people, there has to be a fourth category of sacred lands. People must always be ready to experience new revelations at new locations. If this possibility did not exist, all deities and spirits would be dead" (*God Is Red: Native* 277). Deloria's introduction of this fourth category is of critical importance in that through it he insists on a living adaptable religion and thus a culture that can incorporate change. Deloria describes a religion that acknowledges that all living cultures change and evolve as they react to new political, spiritual, environmental, and geographical or geophysical situations.

In establishing these different categories of sacred places, Deloria offers examples of court cases and other instances in which the United States government and other mainstream entities fail to understand fundamental differences between Western and Native American ways of worship and thus fail to acknowledge the fact of a living culture. As an example of this wide rift between the two worldviews, Deloria refers to the *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protection Association* case (decided in 1988) in which the Indians sued Secretary of Agriculture Richard Lyng in an effort to protect the Chimney Rock area of the Six Rivers National Forest in north-central

California from development by the U.S. Forest Service. Although the development would do irreparable damage to the sacred site, the Supreme Court ruled that the Forest Service had the right to build a paved road and to harvest timber. The majority argued that such operations would not infringe on any actual rights to worship, and therefore the land was not protected by the freedom of religion clause of the First Amendment. In response to the ruling, Deloria argues that Justice O'Connor and the other majority judges missed the point entirely: "In effect, the Court declared that Indians cannot pray for the planet or for other people and other forms of life in the manner required by their religion" (*God Is Red: Native* 270). In addition to advocating the protection of historically sacred sites such as Chimney Rock, Deloria argues that people in positions of power must also acknowledge the possibility of new sites. In a living religion, he maintains, new revelations at sites that are potentially sacred are always in the offing. In this sense, the courts unfortunately further fail to understand living religions by "insisting that traditional religious practitioners restrict their identification of sacred locations to places that were historically visited by Indians" (*God Is Red: Native* 277). Deloria pleads that, like the people, the courts and the government in general must be willing to allow for and to take measures to protect all such sites, new and old.

In reference to a Christian "attempt to bring religious sensitivity to the problem of ecological destruction," Deloria exposes what he calls a "shallow understanding" of the role of religion: "American Indian delegations have been active in world environmental movements but have brought only a romantic sentimentalism as their contribution" ("Conclusion" 213). Further, he argues, "No effort is made to begin a new theory of the meaning of creation" (*God Is Red: Native* 84), especially in the context of humans' relationship with and responsibility toward the land and nonhuman nature: "If all living things share a creator and a creation, is it not logical to suppose that all have the ability to relate to every part of the creation?" he asks. Therefore, the "task of tribal religion, if such a religion can be said to have a task, is to determine the proper relationship that the people of the tribe must have with other living things and to develop the self-discipline within the tribal community so that man acts harmoniously with other creatures" (*God Is Red: Native* 88). To the original edition, Deloria added this passage in his 1994 revision of *God Is Red.* The addition can be seen as crucial

because it articulates his belief in the centrality of the tribal community. He insists that "it is only in the tribal community that any Indian religions have relevance" (*God Is Red: Native* 93). For Deloria, as he states elsewhere, it "is family and community that count" ("Conclusion" 218). The gulf that exists between traditional Western thinking about religion and what Deloria calls the Indian perspective is located precisely in the "difference between individual conscience and commitment (Western) and communal tradition (Indian)" (*God Is Red: Native* 270). Indicative of this reliance on the communal is the notion of what makes a particular place sacred. According to Deloria, there "is immense particularity in the sacred. . . . Sacredness does not depend on human occupancy but on the stories that describe the reevaluation that enabled human beings to experience the holiness there" (*God Is Red: Native* 274). Here Deloria agrees with Momaday, who in the essay "Sacred Places" argues that "[a]cts of sacrifice make sacred the earth. Language and the sacred are indivisible" (Momaday, *Man* 115). If naming and having stories for places mark those sites as sacred, as Momaday suggests, then one can see that in a similar vein Deloria argues for recognition of the connection between story, oral tradition, and sacred place.

In *Red Earth, White Lies* Deloria refers to the importance of stories and the importance of the oral tradition: "Every human society maintains its sense of identity with a set of stories which explain . . . how things came to be." Stories and the oral traditions, according to Deloria, are the "non-Western, tribal equivalent of science" (*Red* 51). In other words, for Deloria stories report the truth as well as the sacredness of a particular geographical or geophysical spot. The stories describe place, and through story the sacredness of place becomes apparent to humans. According to Kenneth Roemer in "Native American Oral Narratives," auditors in the oral tradition need information to understand themselves, their community, and their environment (Roemer 52). Similarly, in *Reading the Voice: Native American Oral Poetry on the Page*, Paul Zolbrod acknowledges the importance of the sacred that "helps define community" (Zolbrod 16). Peggy Beck maintains that the sacred is something shared; it is a " 'collective experience . . . necessary in order to keep the oral traditions and sacred ways vital' " (qtd. in Zolbrod 16). As these arguments insist, survival of the story (and thus creation of and acknowledgment of sacred places) depends on a vibrant

oral tradition and storytelling tradition, and such a tradition demands—as it depends on and insures—oral community. For an oral tradition to thrive, obviously, there must be speaker and auditor. And that community, as oral tradition would have it and as Deloria describes it, is much larger than merely human: birds, other nonhuman animals, and plants compose the "other peoples," and thus everything living participates in creation. As Deloria expresses it, the "whole of creation becomes active participants in ceremonial life." In the context of "profound relationships with the environment," he points out that there are "other forms of life" that do "communicate with humans" (*God Is Red: Native* 274). These other forms of life in fact seek identity with members of the human species. Deloria does not elaborate on how that intimacy manifests itself, however.

According to Deloria, the stories that are passed down from generation to generation have their own validity and in ways are as legitimate as Western scientific approaches. In some cases, in fact, stories can actually supplement or even trump scientific understanding of particular phenomena. One of Deloria's specific examples in *Red Earth, White Lies* concerns the question of Pleistocene extinctions of megafauna. As we have seen, Paul S. Martin and others have singled out Paleo-Indians specifically for blame: "Extinction closely follows the chronology of prehistoric man's spread and his development as a big-game hunter. No continents or islands are known in which accelerated extinction definitely predates man's arrival. The phenomenon of overkill alone explains the global extinction pattern" (P. Martin, "Prehistoric Overkill" 75). Based on what he sees as inherent weaknesses in arguments such as Paul Martin's, Deloria takes issue with his thesis, and in a counterargument he turns, in part, to American Indian stories: "The Indian accounts of megafauna, while nebulous in terms of any measurable chronological scheme for dating, do contain considerable information on the environmental conditions that existed when these mammals were seen in North American by human beings" (*Red* 155). Western science, of course, totally disregards Native American explanations, and Deloria finds that not only unfair but unwise.

It is in this context then that one can begin to understand and appreciate Deloria's views on the failure of Western science. Taking his cue from Arnold Toynbee, who complains of the parochial perspective of Western history, Deloria compares Western science "to a world history which

discusses only the Mediterranean peoples" (*Red* 231). He turns to a discussion of Indian oral tradition to argue that perhaps the megafauna—which Martin and others argue the Paleo-Indians drove to extinction some ten to twelve thousand years ago—actually may have survived into modern times. Deloria notes that Martin himself acknowledges that such information would disprove his extinction theory. Deloria bases this particular facet of his argument on the fact that in the stories of many North American cultures there are numerous accounts of human interaction with such megafauna. Concerning the contemporary existence of the mammoth, for example, Deloria refers to a Chitimacha tradition that recalls "a being with a long nose" that "made its home in a piece of the woods near Charenton." And he notes that the Sioux have a constellation they call the "hairy elephant" (*Red* 146, 143). Deloria makes similar use of accounts of a great bear and the giant beaver and of mastodons and saber-toothed cats. He draws up an "initial list of animals that might be identified" and includes "the giant deer, elk, moose and bison, the mammoth, mastodon, giant beaver, the saber-toothed cat, and most probably the condors" (*Red* 152). Deloria's contention asks his readers to reflect on their own assumptions about the overarching power and influence of Western science to offer explanations of particular phenomena. In this sense, one might argue that the questioning of assumptions is as important as the questioning of the theories of Western science concerning megafauna extinction.

Deloria turns to American Indian accounts again as he exploits what he sees as another flaw in Martin's argument—that concerning the question of why the large carnivore predators also went extinct when they could have simply turned to the millions of other (smaller) game animals: buffalo, deer, elk, for example, that would have been available after the megaherbivores died out. He evokes the Delaware and other traditions that recall a race of giants that destroyed the large mammals. Deloria writes that here he finds a common ground between Western science and Indian tradition: "many creatures, including human beings themselves, were much larger during the late Pleistocene" (*Red* 166) and that body size then decreased. According to a Sioux tradition, the Great Mystery "made a great tent and kept it dark. . . . 'Into this tent he invited the different bands, and when they came out they were greatly changed.' . . . The animals were stripped of some of their physical attributes and talents." Deloria interprets

this account as "some kind of traumatic climatic activity wherein the sky turned black for a significant period of time and great changes took place on the Earth" (*Red* 168). The story thus actually corroborates one possible explanation for the extinction of large mammals. It is not Paul Martin's explanation, but others have indeed offered global climate change as a possible explanation for the extinctions. Deloria favors the theory that can be substantiated by Sioux tradition over the "purely" scientific one offered by Martin.

The point I want to make here in relation to Deloria's response to theories of megafauna extinctions is not necessarily to what degree his responses or his explanations are valid or helpful in terms of understanding zoological history on the continent. He himself writes that considerably "more research and thought must be done before any alternative theory can become a rival to the entrenched orthodoxy concerning the events of the Pleistocene" (*Red* 178). The point I want to stress is that Deloria does take issue with the findings and arguments of Western science and weighs them against alternative explanations of the same events, including those explanations that different American Indian traditions offer. Deloria insists that the scientific record itself is full of flaws and must be challenged. He offers an alternative as a means of countering the contention that Indians were responsible for large-scale extinctions. To accept that American Indians were indeed responsible for the extinctions is to deny that their land ethic is any different from any other human group's through history: "Advocating the extinction theory is a good way to support continued despoliation of the environment by suggesting that at *no* time were human beings careful of the lands upon which they lived" (*Red* 112–13; Deloria's emphasis). Because of the dangers inherent in such a theory, Deloria wants to accept the possibility and wants his readers to accept the possibility of an alternative explanation.

Implicit in Deloria's theology is the notion that in denying or failing to appreciate contemporary, living Native American religions and failing to appreciate the validity of their stories passed on orally over countless generations, mainstream America (represented, for example, by Supreme Court decisions that fail to acknowledge the idea of sacred lands and by scientists insisting Paleo-Indians are responsible for the extinction of North American megafauna despite serious gaps in their arguments) mistrusts

and denies ethnicity. Such failures result in the denial—for any practical purposes—of the existence of contemporary Native America. This denial is reflected in mainstream America's treatment of and attitude toward Native American tribes, toward individuals, toward the landscape, and toward nonhuman nature. Moreover, the very nature of tribal religions brings "contemporary America a new kind of legal problem. . . . So far in American history religious freedom has not involved the consecration and setting aside of lands for religious purposes" (*God Is Red: Native* 278–79). As Deloria sees it, this failure goes hand in hand with the general failure of the United States government in particular and Western culture in general to protect the land and the environment.

Appreciation of the sacredness of lands, argues Deloria, is an essential part both of one's religion and of one's being. Even though this is especially true for American Indians he argues, throughout *God Is Red* he also contends that everyone must see "the fundamental conception of life as a continuing unity involving land and people. . . . as land is held by the community, the psychic unity of all the worlds is made real" (*God Is Red: Native* 174). From the opening passage of the theological tract, he makes his point explicit: "At the bottom of everything . . . is a religious view of the world that seeks to locate our species within the fabric of life that constitutes the natural world, the land and all its various forms of life" (*God Is Red: Native* 1). In contrast to Momaday, perhaps, but like Louis Owens, Deloria demands a proactive stance, as he announces the inextricable links between place, nonhuman nature, human beings, and spirit or religious consciousness. In this context, then, Deloria's land ethic is not only religious but is quintessentially political as well, and it cries out for its adherents to take action.

This is our sovereign nation. These trees are the families of the earth here.

–*Gerald Vizenor,* Bearheart

CHAPTER NINE

Liberation and the Land

The Environmental Ethos of Gerald Vizenor

After his keynote address at a conference in Eugene, Oregon, in May 1997, Gerald Vizenor was asked by a member of the audience to recommend what one might do in order to understand his writings. The lecturer by the window chuckled spontaneously, paused a moment, then said "Read my haiku." Everything he had written, he said, could probably be compacted into a haiku. Perhaps into this one from "Seasons in Santa Fe":

mountain snow
warblers search the apricots
no apologies. (74)

But I don't trust the trickster lecturer on this point. Rather–just as the "salamander earth must hear many great stories to regenerate our survivance in a chemical civilization" ("Tragic" 209)–the reader must hear (or read) many stories (and poems) in order to understand and appreciate the writings of Gerald Vizenor. Where he first seems inaccessible or where an individual trickster story seems to resist or even defy analysis, in aggregate the stories, poems, and essays seem to take thematic shapes. And one of the themes, which becomes apparent, addresses the issue of a specifically Native American affinity with the natural environment.

In the haiku above, coupled with stories, for instance, a theme might emerge from the warblers' search, especially if understood in the context of the wisdom of a salamander trickster, or, in another form, of the liberation of fleas or the mantis, or understood through Clement Beaulieu's meditations, Bear Charme's tricks, or even from Belladonna Winter Catcher's talk on tribal values. Regardless of the shapes of the speakers (or the shapes of the stories themselves), ultimately, Vizenor reminds the reader that the "postindian warrior is the simulation of survivance in new stories" and that "[t]rickster stories are the postindian simulations of tribal survivance" (*Manifest* 15). Vizenor implies that, like Bagese the bear woman in *Dead Voices*, we must come ever "closer to stones, trickster stories, and tribal chance" (*Dead* 6). Or as in his essay "The Tragic Wisdom of Salamanders," the characters in Vizenor's stories must become "the tribal tricksters of the mundane, the traces of the marvelous, and the solace of an escape distance. These trickster stories are aired to creation, natural reason, human unities, and the earth in the wild literature of survivance" ("Tragic" 196). "The native world," writes Vizenor in *Fugitive Poses*, "is actuated in *anishinaabe* totems and stories of survivance. The totem is a native metaphor, a literary connection with creation, shamanic visions, and natural reason" (*Fugitive* 123). As one reviewer of the novel *Dead Voices* puts it, Vizenor's "characters are far from alienated from the earth or from nature. They luxuriate in the challenges posed in the modern world" (Clements 247). According to Jace Weaver, throughout Vizenor's writings characters "recur from book to book, and their stories are retold, becoming in the process new tribal myths" (Weaver, *That* 143). Vizenor's challenge is thus to claim and reclaim, tell and retell the stories and at the same time avoid reductive stereotypes. Ever changing, ever new, ever challenging, the stories must be told and retold; they must not become static.

In the face of numerous assertions about a general Native American affinity with the natural environment by such readers and writers of Indian culture as N. Scott Momaday, Winona LaDuke, and Vine Deloria Jr.—Gerald Vizenor argues against overgeneralization, essentialism, and reductionism. In the context of a human relationship with the earth, however, he does insist that "[w]e have misused the narratives of natural reason as we have the environment; we have abused the names of the seasons, the weather, salamanders, bears, crows, and ants in our creation stories. . . .

The salamander is the new signature of the earth because we must learn to hear once more the tragic wisdom of natural reason and survivance" ("Tragic" 208). The phrase "once more" certainly suggests that "we" once did hear the wisdom of natural reason. In a satirical call for paying attention to the landscape, by which I mean the natural environment, Martin Bear Charme, a character in "Landfill Meditation," insists that "[w]e cannot separate ourselves, clean and perfect, from the trash we dump" ("Landfill" 104). At this point, Vizenor offers an invitation to the reader: "Come meditate on trash and swill odors and become the waste that connects us with the earth" ("Landfill" 105). As a result of his very deliberate and repeated engagement with the environment through his writings, Vizenor forces the reader to reconcile an apparent contradiction concerning stereotypes and generalizations about what it means to be a Native American. He resists reductive explanations and identity signifiers, yet he insists on a unique Native connection with the environment. Such an apparent paradox and how that paradox might be resolved are at the heart of this chapter.

Of the recent criticism on Vizenor, much is devoted to the role of the trickster and of the story and storytelling. LaVonne Ruoff, for example, helps the reader respond to the shifting trickster shapes in Vizenor's fiction, suggesting that satire "is the genre Vizenor most frequently uses to convey the conflicts between the tribal and non-tribal worlds" (Ruoff, "Gerald" 41). Few critics have investigated or even mentioned Vizenor's connection with the land however. In his discussion of Vizenor, Stephen D. Osborne does write that contemporary Native American literature attaches central importance to place (Osborne 118), and Bradley Monsma writes that Vizenor's "recent fiction develops the idea that imagination can begin to reclaim the world's most desecrated spaces" (Monsma 66). But neither Osborne nor Monsma offers a developed response to the importance that Vizenor—through his narrators—places on the human connection to the natural world. In a review of *Landfill Meditation*, Lawrence Smith mentions in passing that the book might inspire one's "taking responsibility for the state of the world" and allow one to change it: "[G]olf courses will be transformed into forests . . . freeways into holographic recreations of warriors and buffalo" (Lawrence Smith 249). But he provides little further analysis of Vizenor's repeated turns to the landscape.

Nor has Vizenor criticism addressed the issue of his land ethic. Donelle N. Dreese includes a discussion of *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* in the context of ecocritism, writing that the author "tricks his readers into learning about the dangers of terminal creeds and ecological exploitation in his first novel . . . by shocking them with explicit and brutal sex and violence. In the novel, Vizenor depicts a postapocalyptic wasteland of nearly total ecological destruction. . . . Bearheart is a depiction of the third world in which characters who continue to exploit the earth or who embrace terminal creeds will perish" (Dreese 106, 107). Dreese does not however speak to the issue of how a Native American land ethic might differ from non-Native attitudes toward the land and nonhuman nature. Meanwhile, Vizenor himself states emphatically in the novel *Bearheart* that environmental destruction is a result of white avarice and indifference: the cedar forests are gone because "frontier politics favored the interests of the railroads and tree killers and agrarian settlers who were promised ownership of the earth" (*Bearheart* 7). In this context Vizenor can be seen to insist on a Native American land ethic at the same time as he distinguishes between Native and non-Native attitudes toward the land. In the *Bearheart* instance, the settlers do not come off too well. They are the ones, in contrast to the heirs, who destroy the landscape.

This is not to say, of course, that Vizenor reinscribes the stereotypes of American Indians as nature lovers or as worshipers of a Mother Earth goddess. His characters are too slippery to categorize so easily. According to William M. Clements, Vizenor celebrates "the role of the mixed-blood trickster" who refuses to be pressed into a cultural category. He transcends "the rigidity of slavish adherence to an unchanging past" (Clements 247). As Kerstin Schmidt describes them, Vizenor's trickster novels challenge the dominant paradigm: a "principle of disrupting and subverting, transgressing the limitations set by the dominant discourse . . . operates throughout and at various levels in Vizenor's work" (Schmidt 66). And as Andrew McClure suggests, a Vizenor novel "tears down one-dimensional definitions of Indian" and "shows that Native American identity is eclectic and multi-dimensional" (McClure 49). As critics have demonstrated, Vizenor relates local, cultural postnarratives that do not fit neatly to the mold of a national narrative. According to Alan Velie, Vizenor the Anishinaabe trickster, like the character Proude in the novel *Bearheart*, is "con-

stantly on the move," both figuratively and literally (Velie 79). In *Other Destinies*, Louis Owens writes that *Bearheart* is "a liberation, an attempt to free us from romantic entrapments, to liberate the imagination. The principal target of this fiction is precisely the sign 'Indian,' with its predetermined and well-worn path between signifier and signified. Vizenor's aim is to free the play between these two elements, to liberate 'Indianness,' and in so doing to free Indian identity from the epic, absolute past that insists upon stasis and tragedy for Native Americans" (Owens, *Other* 231). Vizenor's undertaking is thus to bring his characters as complex, multilayered personages into the now twenty-first century. They are not stuck in the past, and they certainly are not tragic.

Like his characters, Vizenor's narratives themselves are in flux and meaning can be hard to pin down. As Barry Laga writes, Vizenor's "favorite strategy is to frustrate any attempt to translate, represent, interpret, label, categorize, or contain his communal imagination" (Laga 119). Maureen Keady points out that one of the difficulties of reading Vizenor is this very vacillation; truths and falsehoods are "often spoken from the same mouths and within the same sentences" (Keady 62). In this way, Vizenor disallows easy stereotypes. His characters are complex; they are full of contradiction. They are like Vizenor himself, who in a 1993 interview asserts this: "I defy analysis" ("I Defy" 42). Vizenor bemoans the fact that Native American "literatures have been pressed into cultural categories, transmuted by reductionism, animadversions and the hyperrealities of neocolonial consumerism" ("Postmodern" 5). Such admonitions notwithstanding, readers can locate the recurrent theme that survival depends on the stories, and stories pollinate, germinate, and come to terms with the acknowledgment of human identity with nature. As the beavers insist in *Dead Voices*, "survival comes with stories not water." Indeed, "tricksters are stories not real people" (*Dead* 101, 106). One of the grave misfortunes of the non-Indian members of the dominant culture in America is that they have "lost their stories and honored those creatures who were endangered, but otherwise had no ear for the abandoned earth" (*Dead* 133). In this sense, Vizenor, like Momaday, can be seen to recognize the link between identity and story, between story and place, and between place and identity. At the same time that he creates his trickster figures, he dare not allow that they lose their ear for the earth. He must deny the romantic

entrapments suggested by Owens, but at the same time present characters who remember the earth.

One of the difficulties in trying to get Vizenor's characters to fit the mold is, in part, that they are continuously in motion, sometimes literally, always metaphorically. And because they are in motion, in flux, never quite literal, never totally abstract, they do not, they cannot, come to represent a particular stereotype or easily identifiable theme: "Charme is motion, he has no pose," writes Vizenor ("Landfill" 99). In "The Tragic Wisdom of Salamanders," in an effort to eschew stereotypes and sentimental tropes, Vizenor offers the character Laban Roborant, "the salamander man," as the trickster in the new narrative: he "is a trickster healer who would overturn the sentiments of mother earth to embrace the traces of the moist snails on cold concrete." Roborant laments that "the narratives of our parents have been abandoned in the ruins of sentimental representations." He also laments that some "of our best stories died over and over again in romantic confessions to blond anthropologists" ("Tragic" 196, 195, 199). In an introduction to the story "Heartlines," Vizenor argues that the story overturns "the static reductions of native identities with chance and natural reason," and in that story, the author describes an express train that a trickster-liberator commandeers as "natural reason in motion" that served as "a nomadic survivance" ("Heartlines" 142, 152). Accordingly, motion is natural sovereignty: "Gesture reassured me that motion is autonomous, that natural reason and memories are motion, and motion can never be stolen." Vizenor contrasts natural reason in motion with the museum where "the sacred objects in the collection were stolen and are [ironically] more secure than tribal families on reservations" ("Heartlines" 152). As of the train, so of the trickster, about whom there is no closure. Born "of the wind and natural reason," the trickster is "more elusive in the brush than cedar waxwings," writes Vizenor. "Sovereignties were moveable stories, never the inactive documents of invented cultures" ("Heartlines" 143). Vizenor avows in the prologue to *The Trickster of Liberty* that the "trickster narrative arises in agonistic imagination; a wild venture in communal discourse, an uncertain humor that denies aestheticism, translation, and imposed representations" (*Trickster* x). In such ways, Vizenor's characters liberate the reader's mind from debilitating, delimiting stereotypes.

As is clear from such examples, Vizenor takes great care to create char-

acters that by their very motion defy easy categorization. As Kimberly Blaeser points out, in "character and action, as in being, tricksters embody contradiction and ambiguity" (Blaeser 139). Despite the trickster's elusive qualities, however, Blaeser does maintain that "within this infinite range of possibilities, certain of trickster's features can be pinned down" (Blaeser 140). The suggestion is thus that some trickster characteristics can indeed be identified and do recur from character to character or story to story. One of those characteristics is that there is an apparently elusive but recurrent theme of American Indian affinity with the landscape. One can glimpse this feature of Vizenor's writing in a "report" in *Crossbloods.*

In the context of Vizenor's careful avoidance and repudiation of stereotypes that look backward, Vizenor can be seen to take a surprising stance in his brief "report" entitled "Speaking for Mother Earth." He (or the speaker) seems to embrace the "new tribal spiritual revival" that Russell Means and Dennis Banks present, a revival that seems to rely on a stereotype in that it emphasizes "traditional religious connections with Mother Earth" (*Crossbloods* 195, 193). In this essay Vizenor quotes Means and Banks, for example, as they comment on what they see as the important and very real role of Mother Earth: " 'It is our philosophy that because all living things come from one mother, our Mother Earth . . . we have to treat one another with the same respect and reverence that we would our own blood relatives' " (*Crossbloods* 194; Vizenor's ellipsis). Vizenor concludes his report by writing that the "mellow vision of a religious revival is not only a good defense posture in federal court, but a strong connection with the growing expressions of spiritualism rather than materialism" (*Crossbloods* 196). Vizenor's stance in support of Means and Banks is surprising not least because, in embracing such a general "Indian" philosophy, he risks creating what he himself would call a "secure simulation," that is—as he describes it in his postindian warrior narrative *Manifest Manners*—he risks losing sight of tribal realities because they "are superseded by simulations of the unreal, and tribal wisdom is weakened by those imitations, however sincere" (*Manifest* 8).

Lawrence Smith might be seen to offer a partial explanation for what seems to be such a surprising turn on Vizenor's part in a review of *Landfill Meditation.* Smith writes that "Vizenor's crossblood tricksters . . . are given the opportunity to reinvent the world—and that means synthesizing the

most potent elements of European cultures and native cultures, rather than relying on foolish stereotypes 'invented by missionaries' " (Lawrence Smith 248). Perhaps one can argue, in addition, that Vizenor avoids such a reduction in that next time out, as it were, he repudiates the echo of Mother Earth, a move that implies that like his trickster characters, the author himself is constantly in motion. If readers look at "The Tragic Wisdom of Salamanders," for example, they see Vizenor argue that we must abandon the "Mother Earth" metaphor in favor of "new creations" because the notion of a mother earth is unacceptable: "Mother earth, the earth as our abused mother, is a misogynous metaphor" ("Tragic" 195). According to Vizenor, Russell Means accedes "to the tribal creation notions of mother earth." And further, the "earth as our mother would never endure the nuclear silence of the seasons in our stories." Vizenor contends that human beings "must be remembered as the earth with names that mediate natural actions, and new creations must be heard in our narratives" ("Tragic" 195, 196). In the same essay, he fuses human identity with the earth: "We bear the wounds of the earth," he writes; and people must "act in their ultimate identities as the earth" ("Tragic" 205). The suggestion here is that despite the fact that Vizenor rejects the notion of Mother Earth as literal or even as a figurative option, though he had embraced it earlier in his career, he does insist that human identity is nevertheless ultimately and intimately bound or intertwined with the earth.

In the specific context of a dire need for action in the face of environmental degradation, we can thus see Vizenor's challenge as two-fold. Paradoxically, he must liberate the reader's mind from the stereotypes of Indians as environmentally conscious nature lovers, worshipers of the Mother Earth goddess, while at the same time he must somehow make the point that a Native American land ethic is (or would be) significantly superior to the mainstream European American attitude toward the landscape. He must, as he often does, use character to liberate the reader's mind with trickster stories, characters that are often nevertheless consciously connected to the landscape. Vizenor can achieve just that through the Mother Earth character who appears, for example, in the story "Mother Earth Man and Paradise Flies," from an early collection, *Wordarrows* (1978). In this story a group of students gives the character, Matchi Makwa (Bad Bear), the nickname Mother Earth Man, a name through which Vizenor can

make fun of and challenge the very concept of such a divinity as a Mother Earth goddess. The Mother Earth Man character is admirable in his ability to lecture and tell stories, but he is also famous for his bearlike stench and the flies that continually swarm about him. Not your typical romanticized nature man-god. This character, partly Vizenor himself in a sense (and partly a parody of Momaday's literary persona as some have maintained), seems to inscribe, or subscribe to, an Indian-versus-white stereotype: "Indians chase the vision, white men chase the dollar, and the dollar will do them in at the unleaded pumps, said the Earth Mother Man [*sic*]." Mother Earth Man relates that "[w]hite folks got the land, but tribal humor, well, no one can cut down tribal humor like trees" (*Wordarrows* 100, 99). In addition to the importance of humor, Vizenor acknowledges the crucial importance of nature in human culture: one of the white scientists proudly announces his discovery that "we find tongues in trees, books in brooks, phrases from the mouths of fish, oral literatures on the wings of insects, sermons in stone." Vizenor responds that "tribal people have known that since the beginning of words" (*Wordarrows* 93). The response to this "discovery" reinforces or reiterates what Vizenor has suggested many times. That is, American Indians have long known how to listen to and learn from the earth and that there is an important link between language, story, and the earth. Again he implies that there is a significant difference between Indian and non-Indian interactions with and attitudes toward the land.

Vizenor implies yet another difference between tribal and nontribal understanding of and appreciation for the land and nonhuman nature in a reference to N. Scott Momaday. Quoting Momaday's passage about the importance and centrality of the word, recalling that " '*it was older than the silence and the silence was made of it*,' " Matchi Makwa concludes that the "birds knew how to sing from the wind that shaped their wings in flight. Like fish out of water, white people speak words out of meaning. No wonder the white world needed words" (*Wordarrows* 94; Vizenor's emphasis). Matchi Makwa links the distance from the word in this context to the separation of humans from the land. Although Vizenor may be parodying Momaday here, in other instances he describes how a person's alienation from the land—what Momaday calls "psychic dislocation" (Momaday, *Man* 47)—might have come about. In the essay "The Tragic Wisdom of Salamanders" (as in the novel *Dead Voices*), Vizenor's narrator describes his own

sort of psychic dislocation reminiscent of that which Momaday describes: "I fired at those crows over and over on the wing, and nothing died but natural reason and the stories of the earth in me" ("Tragic" 201). In another instance that gives evidence of such dislocation from the natural world, the narrator recalls having killed thousands of ants before discovering that the power of story could enable him to remember his place in the natural order and deal differently even with insects. Before he pauses to think about the results of his mindless or merciless domination, he kills the ants that form columns to and from his pantry: "The distance of my violence haunted the earth in my memories. I cried over the miseries my violence had caused in the lines of the ants." This passage describes the reversal of a colonialist mindset in that through it the narrator becomes able to see and understand from the ants' perspective, and he also becomes aware of the power of story to create a reality. Rather than their own dead, he speculates, the ants might have carried him away, "if the earth had been turned in other stories" ("Tragic" 203). Vizenor thus vividly suggests that the story itself makes reality. In another instance, he is even more explicit: "Creation myths are not time bound, the creation takes place in the telling, in present-tense metaphors" (*Earth Divers* xii).

Vizenor moves from this individual, private encounter with ants to an example of a corporate transgression against the earth. He sets up an identity between the Mother Earth Man character and the first-person narrator: like Vizenor himself (and like the narrator of the essay) "Mother Earth landed once in Santa Cruz, California" ("Tragic" 204). Mention of Mother Earth Man's arrival in Santa Cruz serves as a transition to the first-person account of Vizenor's own encounter with the administration at the University of California at Santa Cruz concerning toxic waste dumps, in the form of hazardous electrical transformers, on the campus.

As a new faculty member at Santa Cruz, the narrator discovers and then calls public attention to the fact that the university authorities are responsible for routinely dumping toxic waste at a site on university property, property that borders a residential neighborhood. In this section of the essay, the reader no longer bears witness to a postmodern Mother Earth character or to an aloof narrator; rather, Vizenor presents the reader with the words of a mainstream academician and administrator at a major United States university. Provost Vizenor points out the need for action but is con-

fronted with hypocritical intellectual and political inertia: "The earth cries to be heard and the faculty critiques radical environmentalism." Vizenor condemns his faculty colleagues for refusing to demand a clean up and laments that "these were the same faculty members who would subscribe to various ideologies and manifest manners, but they would not act in their ultimate identities as the earth. They're orphans who had lost their stories of survivance" ("Tragic" 206, 205). As it is, according to Vizenor, we "are the heinous other in the outside world of the salamander, the other in habitat destruction, the other in the ruins of our own stories about the atmosphere." In the face of this destruction and ruin, Vizenor offers the "salamander earth" as a "story of liberation." Yet he warns ominously that we "bear the wounds of the earth, and that must be an obscure suicide" ("Tragic" 209, 205). Here again he addresses the people's dislocation from the earth and thus from themselves as he points out the hypocrisy of the bourgeois faculty members. At the same time he insists on the importance of story, of human connection with the earth, and of the story's potential to make that connection manifest. We must learn a new way of seeing, such as, for instance, the way the narrator learned from the ants.

In a somewhat Romantic gesture, Vizenor turns to Herman Melville—from whom he gets the salamander of the essay's title—to suggest the need for a human vision, human understanding, human wisdom, greater and more accepting of complexity on the part of his readers. As Melville writes at the end of "The Battering-Ram" chapter in *Moby-Dick*, "unless you own the whole whale, you are but a provincial and sentimentalist in Truth. But clear Truth is a thing of salamander giants only to encounter" (Melville 268). In the Melvillian context, Vizenor thus evokes the Romantic notion of one's special ability to see a truth based on a comprehensive knowledge of the object of study. But Vizenor's use of the salamander is important in another way as well. He demonstrates his awareness of the fragility of amphibians when he writes that the "salamander and the natural mediation of amphibians, for instance, could be an unpretentious signature of the earth, the trace between land, water, and our stories. Consider the stories and memories of salamanders as the natural traces of survivance" ("Tragic" 194). As an amphibian (the class that includes frogs, toads, and salamanders), the salamander is one of the species most fragile and most susceptible to environmental degradation, and therefore a perfect candidate for

Vizenor's character the Salamander man who is intimately involved with the natural environment.

In this context, it is perhaps no accident that Vizenor chooses frogs as an animal in need of being freed in his novel *Griever: An American Monkey King in China.* He uses meditation as a means of liberation, as a means to get beyond the dead voices and manifest manners of mainstream American society. In this novel Griever's meditation is associated with the liberation of the frogs from a science classroom. Suggesting that he has an admirable sympathy for nonhuman nature, for the green frogs in this case, Griever asks probing questions of the teacher. When the teacher explains that the few frogs used in this science experiment won't be missed " 'in the overall world of the frogs,' " Griever asks, " 'Do frogs have science teachers?' " And despite other failures in his liberation attempts, Griever is able to liberate the frogs: "There, in the gentle fiddlehead fern, he imagined that he became the king of the common green frogs" (*Griever* 51). In his own imagination, the monkey king becomes the amphibian king and makes explicit the delicate balance between fiddlehead, frog, and human.

If Griever's meditation is associated with the liberation of the frogs and what that meditation stands for, "Landfill Meditation" has associations with another liberation, equally symbolic. Martin Bear Charme, who makes his appearance in many of Vizenor's stories and essays (also in *Dead Voices*, for example), teaches a seminar on "refuse meditation." He teaches that "[l]andfill meditation restores the tribal connections between refuse and the refusers," asserting that "[w]e were the waste, solid and swill on the run, telling stories from a discarded culture to amuse the colonial refusers" ("Landfill" 99, 101). There is an important point to be made here. Overlooking the double (at least double) meanings in *refuse* and *refuser*, we can see that Vizenor finds fault with a culture as wasteful as mainstream America. He (or Bear Charme rather) exploits this culture of waste, of trash, of refuse, to remind his readers that "taking out garbage . . . we were part of the rituals connecting us to the earth, from the places food grew." Bear Charme insists that "[r]efuse meditation turns the mind back to the earth through the visions of real waste. . . . Come meditate on trash and swill odors and become the waste that connects us with the earth" ("Landfill" 104, 105). The dark humor of the passage, the irony of finding a connection with the earth through garbage notwithstanding, Vizenor's message

is clear: a culture made up of people who are drastically overburdened with garbage—and who yet at the same time remain as sanitized as mainstream Americans do—has indeed lost touch with the earth. Landfill or refuse meditation is thus a form of liberation. It is no accident that several of Vizenor's trickster heroes tend to be notable for their body odor, for their earthy stink.

Meditation as a means of understanding one's connection to the earth plays a part in the novel *Dead Voices* as well. Vizenor introduces the wanaki game—defined variously as "place of peace" ("Landfill" 102), as "to live somewhere in peace, a chance at peace" (*Dead* 17), as a "game of natural meditation," and as the telling of "stories that liberated shadows and the mind" (*Dead* 16). In the course of the novel, Vizenor presents a group of animals, most of which are members of thriving species and in little danger of becoming endangered, yet the book is, at least on one level, a collection of animal liberation stories. Putting aside for the moment issues of the book as parable or as allegory, we can argue that several of the stories describe the liberation of an oppressed group of animals (oppressed but not endangered as a species). Especially appropriate in this context are the "Fleas" and "Mantis" stories. The fleas go to war against the chemical warfare of the exterminator and the mantises have to free themselves from the science teacher who collects them in jars.

But before investigating the literal liberation of fleas and mantis, one should consider an early chapter, "Stones," in which Vizenor recounts an origin story about three trickster brothers—one of whom was "a stone, a hard stone" (*Dead* 25). The first born, Naanabozho, attempts to kill Stone by shattering him into many pieces. "Stone had broken into several families and covered the earth in the four directions. Stone families lived everywhere, in the mountains, on the rivers, in the meadows, in the desert. No matter where that trickster traveled he would not be far from his brother and the families of the stone." Actually, according to Vizenor, human ties to the earth are even more binding than simply being close. Through the wanaki game, a game in which the player becomes the animal on a card turned over at dawn, the players realize their identity with nonhuman nature. In the game "the plural pronoun *we* is used to be sure nature is not separated from humans" (*Dead* 28). Vizenor notes such human identity with nature when his character explains that the old woman and the bear

are one, that "we are one and the same. There's a trickster in the use of words that includes the natural world, a world according to the we" (*Dead* 39). The wanaki game is Vizenor's "war with loneliness and with human separations from the natural world" (*Dead* 29). Vizenor writes about nature and the human being's connection with nature. Crucial to this creation story, and crucial to the reader's hearing the voices, is the understanding—as Vizenor demonstrates early in the book—that no matter where we go, how far away from a literal homeland we travel, we cannot be far from our family of the stone; we will still be close to earth.

We, the readers, might find it in ourselves to pity the white oppressors, referred to as "wordies" in *Dead Voices*, because they seem to have lost the connection to themselves and to the earth, connections that the wanaki game can restore. According to the narrator, the "wordies inherited dead voices and lost the stories that held their world together" (*Dead* 39). Like the faculty at Santa Cruz, the wordy "has no stories to remember. . . . He must have been a trickster who played so hard he killed the animals in his own heart." It is this loss that is responsible, at least in part, for the culture of death, of chemicals, and of manifest manners that Vizenor decries. As the bear in the mirror (or out of the mirror) insists, the wanaki cards "protect us from the dead voices" (*Dead* 31, 33). And those cards also enable Vizenor to inhabit several animals that are commonly thought banes and to tell their stories from their special points of view.

"Fleas," for example, is a liberation story that seems to insist on the standing of creatures that might normally be thought of as one of the basest forms of nonhuman animal life. As unlikely as it might seem, however, Vizenor's fleas evoke the readers' sympathies in this story and get readers to side with them. If there is an identity principle at work where the human is the flea, then there is also the possibility that the flea is the human, and if not the human, certainly the other animals in the wanaki deck. The oppression of the flea can be seen as somehow analogous to the oppression of the human Other. Thus the war the fleas engage in for the last unfumigated apartment becomes symbolic of any war of the oppressed against the oppressor, especially in this context against the chemical civilization. The fleas fight for their rights, for their homes, for their children. The exterminator "learned the common habits of fleas and considered them the enemies of health and wealth in the city. We [we fleas] studied his habits,

the chemicals he used to burn time, and decided that he was a demon who would overturn our inheritance as fleas, so we declared him the primal enemy of life" (*Dead* 45). The natural teacher of flea survival, a flea herself, learns "from the cockroaches that a little bit of poison is the best defense in the chemical world. 'We must arm ourselves with poison, remember our stories in the blood, and fight for what is ours, the right to mount, ride, and suck on bird and beast is aboriginal' " (*Dead* 47). From throughout the entire building, the fleas gather in the last apartment to tell their stories, but they "worried about their children and how they would survive the poisons in the blood of humans. The birds were poisoned to the bone, bears to the wild heart. Would the fleas be driven from the apartment and the world with chemical weapons, aromatic leaves, pet collars, and other devices?" (*Dead* 46). Readers are tempted to see Vizenor as a trickster himself, fooling them into siding with a flea in a war against chemical human civilization, but at the same time the narrative continually pulls in those readers with comparisons of fleas and other animals (birds and bears for instance), with comparisons with the battles fought by oppressed groups in general. Indeed, the very structure and trick of the story—we, as readers, become the fleas, after all—insist that we sympathize with the fleas. The narrative device of using the first-person plural pronoun forces our sympathies and reminds us of our own struggles against the chemical society.

If the account of fleas attacking crotches and riding along, clinging to the anus of the domestic cat cannot be taken completely seriously as metaphors for the standing of nonhuman nature, certainly the much more somber squirrel story can be. Again Vizenor establishes an identity, writing that the squirrels rule "the trees, the benches near the lake, the boulevards, and the attics in houses that were homesteaded by our ancestors" (*Dead* 60). In this chapter Vizenor effectively pulls on his readers' emotions with a powerful description of a squirrel shot by an urban hunter. The point of view is that of the other squirrels, as they describe the shooting of one of their own: "The hunter had a weapon not a vision. The hunter raised his small caliber rifle, took aim, and fired at a stout red squirrel as she ran down a birch branch" (*Dead* 64). After she has been hit, the squirrel named Ducks "reached out with the memories of a wild paw, but the paw was not there to hold the birch. She watched the hunter in the distance and

tried over and over to climb the tree. . . . Ducks had the stories but not the paws to escape from the hunter." The readers' sympathies certainly lie with the squirrel, and the story insists that the hunter, forcefully presented as a murderer, seek and in fact earn forgiveness: "The hunter carried the squirrel to the boulevard. He stretched out beside the squirrel, touched his [*sic*] head and paws, and sang a death song. . . . The hunter was forgiven at last in the city" (*Dead* 65, 68). Thus, even though during the reading of the narrator's shooting of the squirrel the reader sympathizes with the squirrel, the story is not a simple story of good versus evil. As is typical with Vizenor, the readers' sympathies do not necessarily align easily because no sooner has the reader taken sides, as it were, than the hunter asks for and may well get the readers' compassion.

The hunter becomes a complex character in Vizenor's hands. Through his emphases on the natural world, urban animals, and the complexity of the hunter's character, Vizenor demonstrates the importance of land and nature at the same time he challenges the national narrative's tendency toward fixing images and stereotyping. In the "Bears" chapter of *Dead Voices* there seems to be no hope that the hunter will gain or deserve redemption or forgiveness:

> Camellias lean over the concrete. We remember in our stories, but bears never learned the names of flowers. We hear the scent with a natural touch, the scent that was heard by our ancestors. There are no stories to remember in laundry perfume, only the crack of dead voices in a chemical civilization. How is it possible to come closer to flowers with discovered names? Could the hunter learn to shout the names of the bear, panther, and lion, rather than shoot them? No, the hunter is a saboteur, he deceives the heart and shoots from a great distance without a name or stories. To down a hunter how would we shout his name? To the silence in the stones? (*Dead* 41)

In the story "Landfill Meditations," Vizenor dismantles stereotypical attitudes by interrogating the attitudes a hunter and Belladonna Winter Catcher express. Belladonna is a "crossblood" who strings together clichés about tribal peoples as "the living breath of the wilderness" ("Landfill" 232); she is so ready with clichés that critic Patricia Haseltine calls her "a symbol of pan-Indianism" (Haseltine 43). In Vizenor's hands, Belladonna is neither spokesperson for nor adversary of an "Indian" relationship to

nature, but she does clearly suffer from a belief in terminal creeds, which means that she accepts the invented Indian as real as she replaces tribal realities with simulations. Although she might seem to make legitimate points concerning American Indian beliefs, Vizenor casts her as a narcissist, and she thus becomes "her own victim" ("Landfill" 113). According to the breeders and hunters, there is no room at the inn for such terminal believers.

It seems as if Vizenor sets Belladonna up for ridicule as a would-be spokesperson for American Indians as nature lovers, stepping lightly and living in harmony with nature, and worshiping a Mother Earth goddess. She makes several generalizations about American Indians: "we are raised with values that shape our world in a different light because we are tribal, and that means that we are children of dreams and visions. Our bodies are connected to mother earth, and our minds are the clouds, and our voices are the living breath of the wilderness" ("Landfill" 109). Vizenor allows Belladonna to express such clichés but does not let her pat assumptions go unchallenged. She is accosted by a woman in the audience who asks how she is different from white people, and in response, Belladonna fumbles with her beads, and falls into mouthing platitudes about Indian children not being punished, about living in larger families, and about Indians not touching each other. She finally says that "Indians have more magic in their lives." Again she is challenged. She is asked to define an Indian: "if you are speaking for all Indians, then how can there be truth in what you say," asks the horse breeder. A hunter asserts that hunters say the same thing about the hunt, for instance, arguing that "Indians are an invention." He says, "You tell me that the invention is different than the rest of the world when it was the rest of the world that invented the Indian. . . . An Indian is an Indian because he speaks and thinks and believes he is an Indian. The invention must not be too bad because the tribes have taken it up for keeps" ("Landfill" 110). After these several interruptions, Belladonna does have her say. She insists that the "tribal past, our religion and dreams and the concept of mother earth, is precious to me, because living is not important if it is turned into competition and material gain." Despite her turning to her own personal experiences, however, she again speaks in clichés: "Living is hearing the tribal wind and speaking the languages of animals, and soaring with eagles in magical flight." She continues by saying that "[m]y

blood moves in the circles of mother earth and through dreams without time, and my tribal blood is timeless, it gives me strength to live and deal with evil in the world" ("Landfill" 111–12). Even though she switches from generalizing about tribal people to talking about herself, saying how important her tribal past is to her, she continues to reiterate stereotypes and embrace terminal creeds.

The breeder (of western bucking horses) offers a clear condemnation of Belladonna and all that she presents as characteristic of and what it means to be American Indian: "The histories of tribal cultures have become terminal creeds and narcissistic revisionism. . . . The tribes were perfect victims, and if they had more humor and less false pride, then they would not have collapsed under so little pressure from the white man. Show me a solid culture that disintegrates under the plow and the saw" ("Landfill" 113). At this point, given the dichotomy that Vizenor offers, the reader might draw back and question the attacker, reconsider siding with Belladonna after all. The reader might agree that humor is good and false pride bad, but disagree that the plow had no deleterious effects on the landscape or Native American culture. According to Standing Bear, we remember, it was the plow that changed forever the "face of the world" (Standing Bear, *Land* 257). And certainly the reader will not agree that the culture has collapsed. Even though Vizenor complicates the issue by presenting complexities in the characters, the hunters and breeders deem Belladonna someone whose views are terminal, and thus they feed her the poisoned cookie. A terminal dessert.

In such ways, Vizenor thus tends to frustrate the reader's desire for easy stereotypes. Readers might want to fall into the trap that Belladonna sets for them, the trap of believing in the mystical, vision-seeking, nature-loving "Indian," but Vizenor won't let them. He simply will not allow his readers to forget that such stereotypes are inapplicable. But at the same time, he reiterates in many stories that the "wordies have lost their stories, and they shoot each other, convinced that hunters are dressed like bear, deer, and moose. The wordies hear too little and see too much. How could a hunter hear a bear in red clothes?" (*Dead* 63). Vizenor interrogates and ultimately refuses stereotypes. Beneath this rhetorical game, however, lies his firm insistence on the fact that human identity with nature is at the very center of the stories, and thus at the very center of human existence and

of survivance. So at the same time that he frustrates the readers' desire for positive identification, he seems to insist on identifying a Native American connection with the land that is different from that of the wordies or the non-Natives.

Vizenor employs the fact of Native interconnection with nonhuman nature as a provisional strategy that is subject to ongoing revisions but appears or reappears in story after story, shape after shape. Indeed, through his stories (and haiku), he creates counternarratives that at once refute and deny stereotypes yet offer a reliable and recurrent insistence on a special Native American connection with the land. Through transformations, his narratives ultimately liberate the readers from what he calls the "culture of death" or the national narrative of "manifest manners" or the "chemical civilization." And he does this without reinscribing stereotypes that delimit Native Americans. But readers cannot stop here. We must keep reading. To survive, we must keep hearing new stories, must keep the stories alive, keep them dynamic: "The salamander earth must hear many great stories to regenerate our survivance in a chemical civilization" ("Tragic" 209). And Gerald Vizenor continues to create and share with us many such stories, reminding us of our necessary connection with the earth.

By treaty, Ama could kill the cat. And it enrages the people who want to save them, especially when the panther has so many illnesses they hardly stand much of a chance. And I agree with them and with treaty rights, too. How can there be two truths that contradict each other?
—*Linda Hogan,* Power

CHAPTER TEN

"Changed by the Wild"
Linda Hogan's Spirit of Renewal

Early in Linda Hogan's novel *Power* (1998), the sixteen-year-old narrator, Omishto, whose name means "One Who Watches," remembers the panther: "I heard one of those gold-colored panthers once. Its cry was so loud I thought it could bring down the world. But now the world's come down without a cry" (15). Omishto's thought, as she expresses it here, identifies a premise of the novel: through their mistreatment of the landscape humans have broken a covenant with the earth and have thus diminished it, have brought it down. Now, by means of a sort of apprenticeship with her friend and mentor Ama, the young Omishto must learn what to make of this diminished place. Like Ama, she must seek and "find a way to renew the world" (*Power* 125). Faced with the destruction of the panther's habitat, Ama and Omishto must ask themselves, and the readers must ask themselves as well, what to do to protect the endangered animals in southwestern Florida from the draining of swamps, the proliferating of industrial, agricultural, and residential development, and the building of highways. In this novel—as in her earlier novels and in the collection of essays *Dwellings* (1995)—Hogan asks difficult questions about the consequence of humans' having broken their covenant with nonhuman animals and with the land,

and in fact, like a nature writer, Hogan suggests challenging possibilities for restitution and renewal.

Although a novel, Hogan's *Power* in some ways seems very similar to her nonfiction and can thus be seen in ways to fit the genre of nature writing. According to Greta Gaard, for example, Hogan has used her fictional text "as an artistic counterpart to [her] nonfictional activist writing" (Gaard 84). A look at how the novel qualifies as nature writing as defined by Peter Fritzell, for example, can be informative in the context of how Hogan depicts human relationships with the natural world generally and American Indian understandings of their relationships and responsibilities specifically. That exploring the human relationship with nonhuman nature and the landscape is important to Hogan is clear from her memoir, *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* (2001). In the memoir, she writes that the fates of the plants and nonhuman animals are "interwoven with our own human fates in this world we humans have diminished because we have failed to understand how each thing connects with all the rest" (*Woman* 25). It is how each thing connects with all the rest that Hogan is interested in through much of her writing, including *Power*. This is not to say that she does not share with canonical nature writers the sense of contemporary humans having lost a formerly intimate connection with the natural world. In *Dwellings*, for example, she writes that "[w]e remember that all things are connected. . . . It is part of a healing and restoration. It is the mending of a broken connection between us and the rest. . . . [T]hose words create a relationship with other people, with animals, with the land" (*Dwellings* 40). The difference, I think, is not in her denying that something has been lost, but in her seeking a name or a description for it. For Hogan, what has been lost and must be recovered is actually a part of the human self, and thus reconnecting with nature for Hogan means reconstituting a very literal part of that self. And for Hogan, as for Erdrich, her Native American heritage is an important part of that self she seeks to connect with.

According to Peter Fritzell, nature writing is very much a Western phenomenon; it has its roots in Greek philosophy, medieval bestiary, and British natural history, and it culminates with Thoreau's *Walden*. In fact, argues Fritzell, nature writing is essentially an American genre that "captures and reflects the peculiarly deep and detailed . . . relationship between ego and eco, or psyche and bios." As Fritzell defines it, nature writing "is

concerned primarily with relations between 'I' and 'It,' relations between the human self of its author or narrator and the stuff of the geobiotic other" (Fritzell 153, 154). In the prologue to his anthology *Great American Nature Writing*, Joseph Wood Krutch defines the genre by justifying exclusions: "It excludes . . . both purely subjective musing on the one hand, and purely objective scientific observation on the other" (Krutch 2). More recently Robert Finch and John Elder play a similar tune: nature writers are those who respond to the physical creation in ways that are "scientifically informed" but whose writing is "marked by personal voice and concern for literary values" (Finch and Elder 22). Certainly Western nature writers have influenced Hogan in some of the same ways that Thoreau, Muir, and Steinbeck seem to have influenced Mathews as he composed *Talking to the Moon.* In an essay devoted in part to ecocriticism in Hogan's novel, Eric Anderson demonstrates how *Power* "allows ecocritics to discuss precisely the sorts of things" that they emphasize "in their discussions of nature writing" (Anderson 179). According to Anderson, Hogan "clearly enters into debates about the endangerment of Florida panthers, Florida Indians, and Florida ecosystems, and she boldly distributes responsibility for this endangerment" (Anderson 182). In the context of the essays collected in *Dwellings*, Katherine Chandler compares Hogan with established environmental writers such as Terry Tempest Williams, Barry Lopez, and Marilou Awiakta. Like these writers, maintains Chandler, "Hogan reaches into the natural to attain the spiritual" (Chandler 17). At the same time that Hogan's writings clearly share similarities with the Western genre of nature writing, however, the author herself points out in an interview in the *Bloomsbury Review* that she is disappointed in many so-called nature writers: "I see so many disappointing environmental writers who are not writing about the environment at all. They're writing about themselves in the environment, and they often don't understand the world they're writing about. There are clearly writers who are more concerned with traveling around and checking everything out than they are with long-term survival of the habitats that they're working in" (qtd. in Gaard 99). What sets Hogan still further apart from such environmental writers is her willingness to accept, indeed her insistence on accepting, non-Western epistemologies.

In the best known, most anthologized, canonical nature writing texts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—as characterized by Fritzell and

Thomas Lyon, for example—the authors retain a separateness from nature, and ironically, according to Hogan, such a separation is perhaps at the root of the problem of a human's relationship with the earth in the first place. Take as an example Henry Beston's powerful and moving remarks toward the end of *The Outermost House*, when he relays what he feels to be perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from nature: "What attitude to human existence you fashion for yourself, know that it is valid only if it be the shadow of an attitude to nature. . . . Touch the earth, love the earth, honour the earth . . . rest your spirit in her solitary places" (Beston, *Outermost House* 221–22, qtd. in Lyon 83). As intriguing, as inviting, and as potentially healing and comforting as this passage is, its implicit attitude is one that maintains a separateness, one that assumes a physical and spiritual distance between human and earth. As Finch and Elder point out in the introduction to their nature writing anthology, Thoreau, whom they maintain is the progenitor of American nature writing, recognizes "that by focusing on nonhuman nature we objectify and abstract it" (Finch and Elder 23). In writing about Hogan, Chandler argues that she develops a "discourse on the undividable relationship among the human, the natural, and the spiritual" (Chandler 17). Chandler here implies that, unlike Thoreau, Hogan is interested in exploring the assumption that humans and the rest of the natural world are actually indivisible.

It seems to be the idea of a human's ultimate separateness from or objectification of the nonhuman natural world that Hogan denies throughout the collection of essays in *Dwellings*. In "Deify the Wolf," for example, she acknowledges a sense of oneness or of unity between human and nonhuman. Her underlying premise, in fact, is that the wolf is an ancestor, and therefore the same spirit moves both *Canus lupus* and *Homo sapiens*: "all of us are intent on seeing the wolves, or hearing them wail the song our ancestors knew the words to. We are looking for the clue to a mystery, a relative inside our own blood, an animal so equal to us that it reflects back what we hate and love about ourselves" (*Dwellings* 65). In this essay she describes a group of people who search for wolves near Ely, Minnesota, searchers who follow an "inner impulse." They search for "those howling ones the Anishinabe people say human beings descended from long ago, back in the days when animals and people spoke the same tongue." For Hogan, in this instance, tracking the wolves is not so much a means to

"rest" the spirit (as communing with nature seems to be for Beston) as it is a means to discover the connection between the spirits: "Anyone who has heard the howl of wolves breaking through a northern night will tell you that a part of them still remembers the language of that old song. It stirs inside the body, taking us down from our world of logic, down to the deeper lost regions of ourselves into a memory so ancient we have lost the name for it" (*Dwellings* 64). In "Stories of Water," she writes that "this world is in our blood and bones, and our blood and bones are the earth" (*Dwellings* 108). In another essay, "Creations," she writes that "it is only recently, in earth time, that the severing of the connections between people and land [has] taken place. Something in our human blood is still searching for [those connections]" (*Dwellings* 83). In these instances, instances that serve to shape several of her essays in the collection, Hogan acknowledges a recent severing but otherwise challenges the conventional Western separation of human and nonhuman nature. In other words, she notes that in conventional Western thought nature is a place to go to for comfort or relaxation, but she argues that nonhuman nature ultimately is not out there somewhere. Hogan has the ability to recognize one's identity with the nonhuman; indeed, her very identity is the relationship between human and nonhuman nature. As she writes in "The Voyagers," she is content with journeys within: "It was enough mystery for me to ponder the bones inside our human flesh" (*Dwellings* 126). Humans and the landscape are all of a piece she makes manifest: "the face of the land is our face." Hogan argues that "what happens to the people and what happens to the land is the same thing" (*Dwellings* 97, 89). For her, nature is no more nonhuman than humans are nonnature.

In the context of scientists' interactions with apes and the efforts to teach them to communicate with humans, Hogan argues that politics cannot be separated from the human relationship with nature. Politics and nature are intrinsically intertwined: "there has been a narrowing down of the difference between species, and we are forced to ask ourselves once again: what is our rightful place in the world, our responsibility to the other lives on the planet?" Hogan insists that "we are of the animal world. We are part of the cycles of growth and decay" (*Dwellings* 114–15), and thus we have a political responsibility that goes beyond strictly conventional "human" issues. She insists that "we are in relationship with the rest of the planet, and

that connectedness tells us we must reconsider the way we see ourselves and the rest of nature." We must reconsider our politics in relation to the nonhuman world. We have to decide "how we will live with our planet in the future" (*Dwellings* 115). In "The Kill Hole," Hogan recounts the story of Ishi's coming out of the California mountains where his people had been at home for untold generations. He enters the "civilized" world and is soon put on display, as it were, in a Berkeley museum. Hogan's writing here becomes political on another level: "his story illuminates the world of civilization and its flaws. It tells us what kind of people we are, with our double natures" (*Dwellings* 111). Certainly, also of critical importance for Hogan is the question of how humans treat each other; it is a critical part of any such relationship.

Such an acknowledgment of responsibility and of the assertion of identity between human and nonhuman nature is also part of the fabric of the novel *Power*, whose plot offers numerous examples of how different individual humans and different groups of humans relate to and are part of the natural landscape. In broad outline, the novel describes a hurricane that turns Omishto's world upside down; a hunt in which Ama and Omishto pursue and then kill a Florida panther, and apparently bring the carcass back to the house; a subsequent court trial, after which Ama's case is dismissed essentially for lack of evidence against her; and finally a tribal trial in which Ama is exiled, not so much for having killed the panther, but for having not included the Taiga people in her decisions and actions and for not bringing the dead cat to them.

As is evident from this brief overview of the plot, Hogan's interest seems to lie in discovering the human's place in and responsibility toward nature. As Carrie Bowen-Mercer points out in her essay on survival in Hogan's novel, "we can trace the oppositional views of life held by Natives and whites with respect to what it means to be human; what forms of behavior toward land, animals, and tradition are ethical; and what matters to the survival of different people and their environments" (Bowen-Mercer 158). But in so doing, Hogan seems to challenge the dichotomy that Western nature writers set up between the self and nature at the same time that she insists on Ama's own ultimate separation from the world around her. In the intricacies of Ama's character and the breaking down of this dichotomy lie the novel's tensions. On the one hand, Hogan seems to deny

the dichotomy of *eco* and *ego* advanced by Fritzell and others, yet on the other hand, she seems to embrace the assertion that nature writing consists of the scientific informed by the lyrical. Her novelistic account of the Florida panther, in this sense, is more an extended metaphor than a natural history. As the panther comes to represent the human condition and as it takes on lyrical or poetic dimensions, it begins to lose its connection to the actual Florida panther as presented in field reports. The most obvious symbolic representation is Omishto's recognition of the parallel between the endangered status of the Florida panther as a species and of her own (fictional) tribe the Taiga: "there are so few of them, as few as there are of us. Thirty of them, maybe less." That she identifies with the panther that Ama kills can be seen when she notes that "it is like the cut-up land, too, and I see that this is what has become of us, all three of us here [Ama, panther, and narrator Omishto]. We are diminished and endangered" (*Power* 58, 69).

In addition to establishing an identity between the panther and the Taiga tribe, Omishto insists on the fusion of human and nonhuman through repeated references to the striking similarities between Ama and the hunted panther. Omishto states emphatically that the panther "is just like her. . . . and it is also just like me" (Power 69). When the reader first sees the cat, for example, "its body [is] all animal and lean muscle," a description that is very similar to Omishto's description of Ama moments later: "I notice how womanly she is, that she has a strong and curved body." According to Omishto, Ama is especially like the panther itself, whose "eyeshine is its testimony, its voice, its words," and like the panther, Ama is absorbed into nature (*Power* 63, 64). Ama exudes a confidence and demonstrates a lack of fear, but also like the panther, as Omishto describes her, Ama sometimes seems broken down and out of place. The narrator observes that the panther "has broken teeth and fleas and ticks are still escaping the lifeless body." Like the panther and like her own house, Ama is "worn down to within an inch or a minute of falling" (*Power* 69, 79), and by comparison, like the panther, she seems at times strong and sleek and at other times thin and weak. In the courtroom, Ama appears sometimes forceful and vibrant; other times weak and feeble. In the world of the European American, thinks Omishto, Ama "looks dead and tired as autumn grass." The notion of identity between human and nonhuman extends to Omishto

as well. At one point she confesses just how involved and unified she feels: "I am more, at this moment, than myself. I am them. I am the old. I am the land. I am Ama and the panther. It is all that I am. And I am not afraid anymore of the future or the past" (*Power* 130, 173).

The parallels between Ama and the panther are not just facile comparisons of human and feline. As the narrator informs us, "the panther is a place and it holds her, as if they've always known and lived inside one another" (*Power* 67). Like the panther, Ama is also "creature, animal. She is connected that close" (*Power* 143). Ama and then Omishto later share the "same creed as the cat" (*Power* 190). And when just after Ama has shot the panther, when the narrator tells Ama she has killed herself, Ama responds, "I know." Killing the panther is killing the self. Writ large, the panther reflects what the people and the land seem to have become: "the panther people, too, are hungry and sick," Omishto tells us (*Power* 192). Insofar as Hogan insists on an identity between human and panther (and the land), the eco-ego dichotomy breaks down. That is, through her narrator Omishto, Hogan seems to insist on an identity between human and panther that nature writers in general tend to disavow.

In another move that distances her book from traditional nature writing, Hogan seems to disregard scientific consensus concerning the Florida panther. Indeed, even though Hogan actually spent time doing volunteer work in wildlife rehab with the panther, her science concerning the Florida panther in some ways contradicts the published record. By suggesting that this one diminished individual panther represents the subspecies Florida panther, *Felis concolor coryi*, Hogan herself accepts and perpetuates a stereotype of the Florida panther that according to others is simply not credible. The subspecies is indeed endangered (as is Hogan's fictional Taiga tribe), but the individuals of that subspecies are by and large healthy. Based on fifteen years of fieldwork on the Florida panther, for instance, biologist David Maehr writes that, with one exception, his specimens were young and exceedingly healthy: "every new cat we had added to the collared sample since early 1986 was the picture of health. . . . Yet these facts were insufficient to dispel the agency's notion that the average panther was no more than loose skin over grizzled sinew" (Maehr 74). It is as if Hogan has accepted the same notion as did the agency without reference or attention to the data.

This scientific inaccuracy or reduction of the complex situation of the panther on Hogan's part is especially crucial and significant because the major thrust of the novel depends on the stereotype of the panther. For the novel to work, the panther has to be a sickly one. The novel's plot and climactic moment depend on Ama's hiding from her people the fact that the panther she shot was diseased, flea-ridden, weak, with loose skin over grizzled sinew. The reader is thus led to believe that because Taiga stories and beliefs demand that Sisa, the panther, be strong and healthy, they could not endure news of an unhealthy animal. According to the narrator, if the panther is known to be diminished (as Ama and Omishto find their individual specimen to be), the people will lose hope: "It would cut their world in half. It would break their hearts and lives. It would take away everything that they have left in this world" (*Power* 166). Because of the fact of the sickly panther, Omishto must keep her vow of silence concerning the panther's physical state, and on that silence hinges a major crux of the novel, Ama's exile.

From another perspective, Hogan's taking such liberties with science in no way diminishes the novel. Within the fiction itself the reader need not be concerned with the facts of Western science; the reader need only be concerned with the truth. As the narrator tells us about her being on the witness stand in the courtroom: "I can't say the real truth; I can only say the facts. I don't believe in this court, but I don't lie anyway, not out of respect for the courthouse or the men in robes or suits, but out of respect for the truth" (*Power* 127). As Hogan thus sets up the dilemma, it is this truth that must concern the reader. The use of inexact or misleading science does not mean that Hogan's novel does not in other ways share similarities with nature writing in general, but it does demonstrate that her concern is not with Western definitions of the apparent health of the individuals of a subspecies of panther. After all, it is Western worldviews, the *truth* of progress, for example—views made manifest in highways, citrus farms, sport-hunting activities—that have brought the Florida panther as a species to its present precarious condition. Hogan's concern is with the panther and with educating her readers, educating them not in the facts and science of panthers so much as in human culpability, in human responsibility toward the natural world that those readers owe. To educate them in the world of the panther (as well as in the world in which pan-

thers and humans are relatives), she puts the people, the readers, on trial along with Ama. We are all on trial; it is a communal indictment. In this sense, Hogan's truth, the real truth, is voiced by Omishto. In another sense Hogan's choice to accept the stereotypical notion of Florida panthers and thus describe a sickly animal implies the danger of stereotypes in general. Hogan should know that although they are few, the population's existing individuals are healthy, robust survivors, as are the Taiga people as Hogan herself presents them. She thus subverts the stereotype to make the point that even a diminished, sickly panther (like an old Taiga clan member) maintains enormous power on its own turf.

As readers engage in a dynamic reading of the text, like the members of the jury, for example, they are presented with the facts of the case. But unlike the members of the jury, Hogan's readers in this instance have walked through the woods with Ama and Omishto, waded through the swamp, and seen Ama raise and fire the gun. They are thus forced to blend two perspectives. Ideally, they will come away from Hogan's narrative with a new appreciation for what one might call—from one perspective at any rate—the dilemma that the Taiga people face and a fuller understanding of what Omishto means with the word *truth.* Wolfgang Iser's notion of the implied reader in *The Act of Reading* sheds light on Hogan's method here. According to Iser, the text must "bring about a standpoint from which the reader will be able to view things that would never have come into focus as long as his own habitual dispositions were determining his orientation" (Iser 35). In this sense the narrator becomes, by extension, spokesperson for the reader's own responsibilities and culpabilities, bringing to light what would otherwise have gone unremarked and thus misunderstood.

In an essay in her collection *Dwellings*, "A Different Yield," Hogan offers an example of how a different understanding of "truth" might manifest itself—in the context of genetics. Nobel Prize winner for her work on gene transposition in corn plants, Barbara McClintock has a gift, writes Hogan: "Her respect for life allowed for a vision expanded enough, and sharp enough, to see more deeply into the mysteries of matter than did other geneticists who were at work on the same problems" (*Dwellings* 48). Similarly, Omishto is the one who can see. From the very beginning of the novel she senses "something strange and out of keeping" (*Power* 2). Omishto acknowledges that although she thinks herself a skeptic (an agnostic?) there

are times when she believes: "with surprise, I realize that . . . I do believe what Ama believes. I have been lying, even to myself. There are times I do believe this, times like that one when I saw the four women. I saw them and they were there with or without anyone's belief" (*Power* 128). In a sense it is that mysterious presence, that ability to believe, that sends the narrator on her own spiritual journey.

For Hogan, through metaphor in a sense, the narrator of the novel *Power* becomes a spokesperson for the mysterious in nature that is a necessary part of the struggle for survival. As the novel's epigraph tells us, "Mystery is a form of power" (*Power* np), and one recurrent embodiment of this mystery is the panther. And the panther lives in the Everglades, themselves shrouded in mystery. As Marjory Stoneman Douglas points out, "they have been called 'the mysterious everglades' so long that the phrase is a meaningless platitude" (Douglas 2), until Hogan puts meaning back into the phrase, of course. According to Amy Greenwood Baria in an early review, Hogan's novel about the Florida panther "encompasses many faces of power," including, of course, "the power of nature" (Baria 67). Most immediately apparent is the power of the hurricane early in the novel that brings down the Methuselah tree, so named because of its age, a testament to the fact that it had survived many, many such storms. But as Omishto tells the reader, the "wind is a living force" (*Power* 28), and this time the wind is stronger, more powerful, than the tree. Thus the wind brings change, and the wind also brings on Omishto's initiation. The face of power of most concern to the discussion here is not the hurricane, however, but rather the power of the panther. Panthers embody power in themselves, but in this specific instance an individual panther can also represent the power of survival, the power needed to survive in extremely difficult and compromised situations. The panther's power is also evident in Hogan's insistence on its identity with humans. The Taiga people are after all of the Panther Clan, and they get their spiritual power from their totem animal, quite literally, as Omishto declares, the Florida panther: "I'm from the people of the Panther Clan, which makes me a grandchild or niece to Sisa." Its name, Sisa, "means godlike, all-powerful. The cat is the animal that came here before us and it taught us the word, Oni, which is the word for life itself" (*Power* 85, 73). Just as the fact of its being endangered parallels the precarious situation of the Taiga tribe, the individual panther

shares an identity with human beings, specifically and most poignantly with Ama. There is immense power in the fusion of the two species.

To insist on the power of mystery is to confront the truths of Western science, to confront the hard facts, and thus to challenge mainstream American science with its reliance on facts. In *A Natural History of Nature Writing* (published the same year as Hogan's collection *Dwellings*, 1995), Frank Stewart argues that "nature writers make us aware that neither biology nor imagination by itself can illuminate." He goes on to say, however, that "nature writing at its best is a literary art as rigorous as natural science, with a similar allegiance to verifiable fact" (Stewart xix). Rigorous yes, but given this definition of the genre, Hogan is clearly pushing at its boundaries in her own writing. What, after all, she might ask with a rigor of her own, is a verifiable fact? According to Hogan, "the place of spirit, and mystery, we must remember, by its very nature does not wish to be known" (*Dwellings* 20). Just as in the novel *Power*, then, in several essays, Hogan investigates the fine line between hard scientific fact and events whose cause remains a mystery that cannot be explained but whose cause is nevertheless a truth.

In many of the essays in *Dwellings*, Hogan suggests that the spiritual or mystical power also often depends on the geobiotic for expression. Take for example her assertion that "life is a mystery we can't trace." In this essay, "Creations," she laments that "we have forgotten that this land and every life form is a piece of god." She quotes Loren Eiseley in reference to *"'that mysterious principle known as organization'"* to emphasize the importance of the unknown and perhaps unknowable in the world around us (*Dwellings* 95–96; Hogan's emphasis). Investigations of mystery and the spiritual recur throughout the entire collection. In the essay "Deify the Wolf" Hogan acknowledges that "the frozen world seems full of the voices of spirits"; and, as we have seen, she notes that she and the others on the wolf-sighting excursion, mentioned above, "are looking for the clue to a mystery, a relative inside our blood" (*Dwellings* 66, 65). In another essay, "The Caves," she declares that she feels that "there was something deeper than human that day . . . something of the world of myth" (*Dwellings* 34). In "A Different Yield," as noted above, she writes that what distinguishes McClintock from other scientists is her admirable ability "to see more deeply into the mysteries of matter" (*Dwellings* 48). Enumeration of these several instances of how Hogan sees mystery around her is

meant to demonstrate that she insists that despite the advances of Western science, mystery does indeed surround us, and it remains of fundamental importance to humans' understanding of their place in the world.

Hogan devotes the essay "The Feathers" to investigating the mysterious, the inexplicable "mythical world" (*Dwellings* 19). If searching for or seeking after the undiscoverable is part of the overarching thesis of the collection *Dwellings*, it is clearly appropriate that this piece lead off the collection. As the first, it serves to introduce the reader to the power of mystery in a book that is to be about the spiritual and mundane human connectedness or oneness with nature. In the essay the narrator is surprised and delighted to find an eagle feather that has dropped from the bird she has just seen, just as a voice in her sleep told her it would happen. Her finding the feather in the first place, she says, defies logic and science, but she does find it: "I know there is a physics to this, a natural law about lightness and air. This event rubs the wrong way against logic. How do I explain the feather? . . . I can only think there is another force at work, deeper than physics and what we know of wind, something that comes from a world where lightning and thunder, sun and rain clouds live" (*Dwellings* 16–17). Whether or not we read this assertion literally, Hogan is making the point that clearly Western science and systems of logic alone cannot account for the natural phenomena we witness in nature.

The wisdom she gains from such a force, such a belief, later in the account leads the narrator to her granddaughter's umbilical cord, which she had been storing in a "tall black pot until [she] could make and bead an umbilical bag" for it. When she is ready, however, the umbilical cord turns up missing. At first she searches in vain, but then after performing a ritual prayer, she finds the feather pointing "at the umbilical cord, so mysteriously now on the floor [she] had already searched" (*Dwellings* 17, 19). Her finding the umbilical cord in that place defies logic. It simply wasn't there when she looked earlier. She presents the reader with the question of whether or not belief in a reality creates that reality. If she truly believes the feather will show the way, the feather will indeed show the way. This is similar to a moment in Owens's novel *Wolfsong* when Tom Joseph recognizes that the greatest danger to his success in the spiritual cleansing is his own lack of belief: "He knew that nothing had happened because he hadn't really believed" (Owens, *Wolfsong* 87). Similarly, Hogan acknowl-

edges that "[i]t was the feather that took [her] to the baby's umbilical cord," and she thus insists that "[t]here is something alive in a feather": "The power of it is perhaps in its dream of sky, currents of air, and the silence of its creations. . . . How did the feather arrive at the edge of the dirt road where I live? . . . This I will never know. Nor will I know what voice spoke through my sleep. I know only that there are simple powers, strange and real" (*Dwellings* 19, 20). Hogan maintains that she cannot "say why it is so many of us have forgotten the mystery of nature and spirit, while for tens of thousands of years such things have happened and been spoken by our elders and our ancestors" (*Dwellings* 17). But she does believe. With these reminders, "The Feathers" essay teaches us, the readers, to reconnect, and it offers a way to believe in the physical world that is perhaps different from the belief systems of adherents of traditional Western science, different from the beliefs of many of Hogan's readers.

In offering an essay describing such an inexplicable series of events, Hogan walks the fine line between the world of mystery and the world defined by and understood through Western science and Western nature writing, or as she puts it, "a still place, a gap between worlds" (*Dwellings* 20). Despite her venturing between the two worlds, however, much of the import of the novel *Power* does indeed hinge on the Western reality of the panther as a member of an endangered species and as an individual animal that is weak and sickly. Omishto supposes that Ama kills the panther because it is pathetic, and—as we have seen—Ama herself believes that she cannot tell her Taiga people of the physical condition of the panther because for them to know that it is unhealthy would break them and would cause them to lose hope. Ama's (Hogan's?) assertion of a sickly panther is problematic for at least two reasons. First, as made clear by studies such as David Maehr's, as noted above, the individuals of the general population of panthers are young and healthy, and their good health is apparent in their appearance. Hogan thus challenges an informed reader's credulity; and second, and more important to the novel as a novel, as fiction, the Taiga people, as Hogan describes them, are themselves survivors of five hundred years of oppression and misfortune. The reader is challenged to believe that one sick panther will break such a people. Omishto does accept Ama's contention, and she keeps the secret from the Taiga elders: "If they saw the face of it, that skinny cat dead on the black grasses, they

would no longer believe or have hope. They would lie down on the ground and never get up again in this world." But Omishto's assertion of a sickly panther is followed immediately by the mention of a sickness much larger and widespread than of one sick panther: "the world where the cars pass through on the cut roads and the roar of machines breaks through the swamps among the dying fish" (*Power* 167). And of that sickness the Taiga people are fully cognizant. If the people can maintain hope in such a world, would one sick panther render them hopeless, unwilling or unable to go on? The question is especially difficult when one remembers that as Hogan has insisted, "even sick, the cat was still sacred" (*Power* 166). The question comes in the context of Omishto's repeated assertions of the tribal members' ability to survive: "But we, us Taiga people, haven't run. Instead, silent and nearly invisible, most of us have been pushed up against the wild places" (*Power* 8). The people have survived not only the storms, but the settlement by non-Indians, the draining of the swamps, the building of the highways, the clearing of land, and the shooting of panthers by boys who are not Taiga. Despite all the pushing, Omishto reminds the reader, the people survive, century after century.

Thus, even if readers accept the exception of the sick panther, the problem with Ama's reason for keeping such information from her people remains. Certainly the survivors, the Taiga people, the Panther Clan, especially the elders, know the panther. Certainly they know the status of the population. If there are sick panthers out there, the members of the Panther Clan must know that as well. To suggest otherwise is to delimit them. Why would only Ama know? The Taiga elders must also know that from a biological, ecological, or environmental standpoint, Ama commits no crime. The panther she kills is evidently beyond being able to reproduce or raise healthy offspring. As far as the species is concerned, if this one animal is so sick, Ama is in fact doing the Florida panthers a favor. Her crime is thus not killing a panther; her crime is in lying, in not telling the whole truth, and in not involving the other members of the tribe in her decisions and actions. Her crime, in short, is maintaining and perpetuating the very isolation and separateness that mark nature writers as people who insist on a separateness between humans and the members of the nonhuman world. Not only does Ama live alone, physically removed from the tribe, but she acts alone in hunting the panther (Omishto's complicity as

accessory notwithstanding). Ama's killing the panther is thus in a sense her killing herself—not only because she is one with the panther but also because she is alienated from communal life and her tracking and killing the panther without tribal authority and support is a transgression against an unwritten tribal ethics. Her exile at the hands of the tribal council is thus merely the tribe's acknowledgment of a physical manifestation; Ama has already left them well before she kills the panther and before they actually pass judgment.

Before the judgments, the reader remembers, Omishto is on the witness stand, in the courtroom where Ama is on trial. Ama has freely confessed to killing the protected Florida panther, and her defense lawyer tries to make the point that his client wasn't aware of the endangered status of the panther, that she is therefore somehow innocent. But clearly the lawyer misses the point altogether because he doesn't know the "real truth" as Omishto would put it. He is no more able than any of the others (the judge, the lawyers for the prosecution, or the members of the jury) to understand the truth. As the narrator tells us, this event "is not their affair." She wonders: "What can I tell them that they will hear?" (*Power* 130, 131). Omishto thus addresses the reader, who like members of the jury, might find Ama's act not only illegal but also cruel and unnatural. Ama has undertaken the ceremonial killing of an endangered animal, and a high-profile endangered animal at that. But the laws of the state and of the nation, and the readers' understandings of legality, in some ways do not apply in this instance, as Omishto is fully well aware: "Yes, it was against the law, but I saw with my eyes the boys driving through the place in their swamp buggies killing the land and the men wouldn't hold up so much as a finger to stop them" (*Power* 125). Omishto describes an older world, or a different world, whose laws are not necessarily explained by or contained in Western legal briefs or scientific reports: "what [Ama] did on that day seemed like a natural thing and I can't say why. It was like how the world does things on its own. It kills them, I mean. Every last thing. It creates destruction so that it can go on. How can I explain this to them? . . . How could I say it in any way that might convince them it had been coming a long time" (*Power* 126–27). Omishto's suggestion here is that Ama acts as an integral part of nature, denying and defying the Western-imposed dichotomy between human and the rest of the natural world, that is, in part, her "older world."

Caught in the moral bind between what she believes to be true and what the state maintains is fact, Omishto on the witness stand tells the lawyer one story, but often informs the reader of another, of what she is thinking, of what she consciously does not tell the lawyer. In this distinction or between these two spaces the readers must adjust their views and find a place for their own beliefs and responses. And how do readers respond to the very deep and painful irony in the notion of endangered status for the Florida panther in the context of the loss of habitat? As the narrator reflects: "I think of them, the cats out there in the cypress and mangroves and swamps humans aren't meant to enter. . . . And I think of the cats killed by cars. A dozen of them since the highway went in" (*Power* 123). As David Maehr writes in his study of the Florida panther, the "panther's problem . . . is space. The survival of [this species will have] everything to do with the way their landscapes are managed. . . . Diseases, parasites, highways, hurricanes, inbreeding, and heavy metals have all been cited as immediate threats to the panther's existence. Yet none of these problems has impaired the panther's ability to live and reproduce where there is suitable habitat" (Maehr xi). Throughout his study, Maehr insists and repeats that the "Florida panther is a creature of the landscape. A panther's health and productivity depend on habitat quality" (Maehr 225). In this sense, Omishto (Hogan?) offers a valid assessment of the panthers' predicament. Loss of a safe habitat is the greatest problem. It is not the health of any individual panther or group of panthers; rather, it is the health of the land itself.

The readers, the judges, the lawyers, the real estate developers, and the citrus and mangrove farmers all have full knowledge, now if not before, that destruction of the panther's habitat is equal to killing the protected animals—yet destruction of the habitat is not illegal, is not punishable by the state's laws. This is a point Omishto makes. The roads, in fact, are celebrated as "delightful surprises." Alligator Alley (as Florida Highway 84 is called), for example, crosses one of the nation's last remaining "wildernesses," and is therefore a must for adventure tourists. Some of Hogan's readers have perhaps driven that highway. And it is in this irony, this truth of the reader's culpability, that one of the values of the novel rests.

In this story about the demise of the Florida panther that in ways parallels the diminishment of Hogan's fictionalized Taiga people, Hogan insists,

as indicated above, on the restorative powers of mystery. She insists that the people, like the panther, promise to survive: "It is their belief that has brought them this far" (*Power* 167). She suggests that belief in mystery, that the story and storytelling, that courage, and that the ability to see more deeply into nature—the ability to see different worlds—will take them further, will allow revelations that will astonish the scientific community. As the narrator comes to realize, her role is at once both personal and public: "All the hopes and fears I could pull out of the world enter me now. The woman inside me, can I betray her, the one I am becoming? I know only this, that I am Taiga, that the future depends in some way on me" (*Power* 217). As Omishto realizes once she begins to tell her story to her own people, "survival depends on who I am and who I will become" (*Power* 161). Survival, according to Hogan, depends on who we are, on who we will become. It is thus ultimately Omishto, the Native American, and the Taiga way of life that hold the promise of a sustainable, an ethical, a viable relationship with the natural world. Yet that way of life includes on some level the sacrificial killing of an endangered animal. How then does Hogan respond to and account for something as controversial and challenging as the Makahs' decision to hunt gray whales? The controversy was in fact raging as Hogan was writing her novel, and it is to this question that the next chapter turns.

A whale passes.
From dark strands of water
it calls
its children by name.
Light, Smoke, Water, Land
–Linda Hogan, "Fat"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Killing the Whale
Sightings *and the Makah Hunt*

In 1999 a group of Makah whalers killed their first gray whale in some seventy years, and in so doing, they reestablished or reinitiated a long dormant tribal tradition. Members of the hunting party were from traditional whaling families among the Makah Nation in extreme northwestern Washington State who, despite historical family connections, had to earn the right to be a part of the hunting party and actually hunt the whale. Basing their canoe and harpoon designs on artifacts collected in the museum on the Makah reservation in Neah Bay, Washington, they built their own canoes, fashioned their own harpoons modeled on those of their ancestors, observed some of the traditional rituals as they trained for months, and—to some degree in the traditional way but against great political and social opposition—successfully hunted a gray whale.

One of the outspoken opponents of the hunt was Linda Hogan. In a *Seattle Times* editorial, however, she qualifies her opposition by insisting that the treaty rights of the Makahs, as of all Indian tribes, must be upheld: "*I think of my responsibility as a Native woman to preserve the world for the future. It is also my responsibility to stand up for treaty rights. And here is where the conflict begins*" (Peterson 102; Hogan's emphasis). Nevertheless, she insists, there is a tradition even older than that of Makah whaling, and that tradi-

tion is listening to tribal elders, especially the old women who place great emphasis on the identity relationship between humans and whales. She argues for remembering and honoring the "unremembered story of the whales who do not belong to human beings" (Hogan, "Silencing" B9). Hogan returns to this argument in the book she coauthored with Brenda Peterson, *Sightings: The Gray Whales' Mysterious Journey* (2002), writing that in "*their location at the end of the continent, a people are trying to lay claim to an older world and its complex of ceremony, but which people? It may very well be the silenced older women*" (Peterson 154; Hogan's emphasis). In supporting both treaty rights and the whale's rights, Hogan faces an apparently irreconcilable paradox, and the issue in these terms is not unlike the issue of Ama's ceremonial hunting of a Florida panther. It also shares similarities with the literary conundrum of arguing for an American Indian land ethic while at the same time defying stereotypes of Native Americans as inherent land stewards.

The issue of Makah whaling raises a number of questions applicable to a study of Native American literary responses to the environment, most immediately, perhaps, the question of how a turn from literary analysis to discussion of an actual historical controversy fits into and furthers the larger issues of the present study. That is, how might issues Hogan raises in a novel like *Power* be applicable in such nonacademic, nonfictional situations? And how do we read the literature that the controversy has spawned? This chapter thus looks at the specific controversy and what it stands for in legal, political, practical, social, colonial, and of course literary contexts, on both the communal and global levels. What are the historical and traditional reasons for hunting and what do they mean in the contexts of global community? How is opposition to the hunt one more example of the colonizer's effort to destroy the lives and livelihoods of Native Americans? What is involved in considering whaling from a strictly environmental or animal-rights perspective? That is, how do we (or can we) consider the issue out of its specific geopolitical, historical context? How should non-Native scholars of Native American literature and history consider the issue of Makah whaling as they begin to decolonize their methodologies? How might the effort to decolonize American Indian studies contribute to the discussion of issues such as those raised by Makah whaling? And finally, how might considerations of the fact that cultures evolve over time

affect the way one thinks about tradition in the context of what it means to be a whaling nation?

In Hogan's novel *Power* (published in 1998, the year before the 1999 Makah whale hunt), set on an opposite corner of the continent—the Everglades of southern Florida—the character Ama Eaton, member of the fictional Taiga Indian tribe, tracks down and kills a panther. The narrator Omishto suggests to the reader one of a complex of possible reasons for the hunt and the killing. Ama "believes that she killed her guardian, the sacred cat that taught us the word for wind . . . that she killed it for our people to go on, traded its life for our lives, and that it will return, new and healthy, and so will the world of our people" (*Power* 189). For the Taiga people, the panther was here first and helped to breathe life into human beings (*Power* 73). As we have seen in the previous chapter, Hogan's novel is in may ways an investigation of the legality, morality, and efficacy of hunting and killing a specific animal (in this case a member of an endangered species, the Florida panther) as a means of saving the people for whom that animal is sacred: Ama "knew there had to be some act, however desperate . . . to restore this world to balance, to bring young people home from their empty days, home from the white man's schools and away from the white man's televisions" (*Power* 189). According to Carrie Bowen-Mercer, in fact, Ama "brings her people hope for survival by fulfilling her mythic destiny of becoming Panther Woman" (Bowen-Mercer 168). Meanwhile, in Neah Bay, one of the actual hunters, Micah McCarty, says he feels the need to resist the white man's culture and believes that the whale hunt, somehow, will keep it away—"bringing this whale back into the culture," he says, "will save us from being swallowed up" (qtd. in Blow 8). As a whale hunter, McCarty thus attributes to whaling a means of preserving the people, a way for the people to survive materially as well as spiritually. Clearly then, through fiction, Hogan's novel *Power* raises the same philosophical tribal issues that the Makah whalers raise. Issues of tribal identity are inextricably linked and intimately related to the controversy over Makah whaling.

Not all of the participants in the hunt agree with McCarty's feelings that whaling establishes or is crucial to tribal identity. At least one member of the crew of hunters, Wayne Johnson, for example, questions his own involvement: " 'It hurt me so much, I sometimes wish I had never gotten

involved' " (qtd. in Peterson 161). Although the successful whale hunt restored a dormant tradition that many Makah tribal members asserted to be central and fundamental to their sense of who they are as members of a community that historically defined themselves as fishers and whalers, there was, as implied by Johnson's comment, internal opposition. The politics of such internal opposition is depicted in the novel *Power*. The old people banish their own Ama because she has not brought to them the skin of the panther she killed. Omishto reflects that these "old people are the ones who know the laws of this place, this world, laws stronger and older than America" (*Power* 160). At Neah Bay, those who opposed the whale hunt (including many people within the Makah tribe itself) argued that despite treaty rights and the use of traditional hunting methods, killing a whale was a violation of animal rights and that the traditional practice of whale hunting no longer had meaning, and that therefore the practice should not be resumed.

Unlike Ama's act in the novel *Power*, however, the Makah tribe's hunt was very literally legal: tribally, nationally, and internationally. In challenging the whale hunt, however, Hogan challenges and calls into question the very concept of the West's notion of legality. In *Sightings*, she writes that "*when it comes to whaling and other animal kills [the hunters] are never tried, though the judgment goes down in history*" (Peterson 43–44; Hogan's emphasis). In the specific context of international whaling, the language of the 1855 treaty is straightforward: "The right of taking fish and of whaling or sealing at usual and accustomed grounds and stations is further secured to said Indians in common with all citizens of the United States" ("Treaty of Neah Bay" Article 4). According to a statement by the United States Delegation, the "International Whaling Commission . . . adopted a quota that allows a five-year aboriginal subsistence hunt of an average of four non-endangered gray whales a year for the Makah Indian Tribe" (U.S. Delegation). In May of 2002 the International Whaling Commission "reaffirmed the Makah quota of 20 gray whales to be 'harvested' through 2008" (Peterson 161). It is important to note that the gray whale is no longer on an endangered list. The federal government's "environmental assessment of the [Makah] hunt found that it [would] not adversely affect the gray-whale-stock's healthy status, which is currently at more than 22,000. The gray whale was taken off the U.S. Endangered Species Act list in 1994" (U.S.

Delegation). At the same time the Makahs were granted the right to hunt 4 whales a year, Russia's Chukchi people were granted the right to take 120 gray whales, further indicating that the species is thought to be healthy. Given the 1855 treaty, the National Fisheries interpretation, the International Whaling Commission's ruling, and the whales' nonendangered status, then, the Makahs hold and had reaffirmed the legal right to hunt the gray whale.

Despite the treaty's directness, however, there is an implicit ambiguity in the text. That is, given the wording of the treaty, the individual members of the Makah tribe have the same right (or lack of a right) to hunt whales as do any other American citizens: the Makahs "in common with all citizens of the United States" have the right to take whales. Given the wording of the treaty, the implication is that once that right is denied United States citizens in general, it could by extension be legally denied to the Makahs. This potential problem did not come up during the deliberations concerning the hunt, however. And had it come up, it would also have raised the counter-issue of tribal sovereignty. In *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) Linda Tuhiwai Smith addresses just such issues concerning tribal sovereignty: "States and governments have long made decisions hostile to the interests of indigenous communities but justified by a paternalistic view." At the same time, however, she argues that the "politics of sovereignty and self-determination have been about resisting being thrown in with every other minority group by making claims on the basis of prior rights" (Linda Smith 150, 151). Indeed, to have interpreted the treaty in a way that would have pooled the Makahs with "all citizens of the United States" would have been to deny the tribe its sovereignty.

Neither proponents nor opponents of whaling have to my knowledge articulated what can be seen as another irony inherent in claiming treaty rights at the same time that the tribal members assert the importance and legitimacy of their tradition. The very concept of the traditional Makah is compromised in the face of contact with Europeans, in that it is the contact that necessitates a treaty guaranteeing traditional rights in the first place; that is, the right to hunt "at usual and accustomed grounds" presupposes a precontact tradition ("Treaty of Neah Bay"). Tribal Chairman Greig Arnold fuses the ideas of tradition and treaty rights when he argues that whaling is a fundamental Makah tradition, and that tradition as well

as treaty rights deserve to be upheld: "Our treaty gives us the right to ask for the lives of the whales we hunt. Our ancestors negotiated the treaty in good faith with the United States," and, he continues, "We must protect our treaty until the tide quits coming in and out" (qtd. in Shukovsky). And Vine Deloria Jr. emphasizes yet another important consideration in the context of treaty rights, writing that in "almost every treaty . . . the concern of the Indians was the preservation of the people . . . when we understand the idea of the people we can also learn how the idea of the treaty became so sacred to Indians" (V. Deloria, *Nations Within* 8).

What opponents have stressed, of course, is that the Makah "tradition" of whaling has itself been reinvented after several generations of dormancy. As the whaling crewmembers themselves are proud to relate, because there were no living whalers to help them in either their material or spiritual preparations for the hunt, they did historical, archival research in order to build their canoe and oars, design their harpoons, and reinstate the ceremonial practices surrounding the hunt. In this sense, authenticity becomes an important issue in the controversy. The problem with challenges to issues of authenticity, however, is that they deny the possibility for and reality of tradition actually incorporating cultural change yet remaining a legitimate tradition.

In *The Ecological Indian*, Sheperd Krech III finds fault with the Makahs for pursuing the right to whale in one of his examples of the conflicts between conservation and environmental organizations and American Indians. He points out that in the case of the Makah whale hunt, the "Humane Society International threatened a lawsuit. And Paul Watson, head of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, complained that the Makah were clearly not dependent on whales for subsistence" and he (Watson) therefore opposed the hunt (Krech, *Ecological* 223). Krech does not, however, put the controversy in its proper or full context. The hunting of a whale, an 1855 treaty right (a right Krech conveniently neglects mentioning), in itself is not necessarily a failure of a tribe's beliefs in its connection with the land or the environment. As Krech himself acknowledges earlier in the chapter on his way to making a different point, the "Indians whose lives were examined [in his study] were motivated to obtain the necessary resources and desired goods in proper ways. Many believed that animals returned to be killed, sometimes in virtually infinite numbers, as long as hunters

demonstrated proper respect" (Krech, *Ecological* 213). In this instance as in many others throughout his study, Krech imposes his late twentieth-century definitions of conservation and environmentalism on a practice that, according to the Makahs, is centuries old, and which thus—as Hogan's narrator in *Power* suggests in another context—predates America.

In his litany of twentieth-century Indian transgressions against the land, Krech is explicit. But according to Mindy Pennybacker in a review of *The Ecological Indian*, we remember, "Krech's subtext is far more insidious: It seeks to absolve Europeans of blame and ultimately can be used to help fuel a backlash of anti-Native sentiment in this country. (Witness the outcry, for example, when the Makah Indians of Washington wanted to hunt a whale and the Humane Society International and Sea Shepherd Conservation Society sought to stop them)" (Pennybacker 3). By extension or implication, Pennybacker raises the issue of sovereignty rights over environmental or animal rights. In her examples, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society and other groups that oppose Makah whaling can be seen, through that opposition, to "fuel a backlash of anti-Native sentiment." In this scenario and context, the Sea Shepherd and Humane Society members, as protectors of the gray whales, are clearly the environmentally sensitive ecologists whereas the Makahs become the environmentally insensitive, lawless ones. Such stereotyping, on Krech's part for example, is of course just as dangerous as—if not more dangerous than—its inverse, that of the environmental Indian. Such miscalculations and misperceptions are as old as contact. In his discussion of Columbus and the misnomer for the people he met on the islands, W. Richard Comstock writes that Columbus's "goal, while practical, was fraught with the weight of myth. And the importance of this ambiguous interweaving of mythic and worldly fact was that it caused the European to 'see' the native American in certain contradictory ways that had fatal consequences" (Comstock 61). One of the results of such misunderstandings is that there remain only two options: Native Americans can be either noble or savage, either noble environmentalists or savage whale hunters, in this context. There is no space in between.

Perhaps the question does not have to be whether or not a person or a group of people can hunt whales and at the same time retain an environmental or conservationist consciousness; the question rather can be how the hunting practice fits into traditional, or sustainable, tribal prac-

tices and how those practices are supported or identified by the culture. Another important issue in the context of establishing a traditional right to hunt, then, is that many people (Linda Hogan and Brenda Peterson among them) assert that the actual hunt was in too many instances not traditional despite arguments to the contrary. Yes, there was a canoe, and yes, the harpooner did indeed harpoon the whale after giving chase under human power. And yes, the community did share in the distribution of the whale's meat. But nevertheless, they insist, the notion of tradition is problematic. The Makah "tradition" of whaling had to be reinvented after several generations of dormancy; indeed, the tradition was essentially rediscovered with the archeological digs in the ancient Makah village of Ozette. Beyond the authentically fashioned canoe and harpoon, according to many accounts, very little of the tradition was observed. Most immediately, perhaps, is the fact that the whale was finally shot with a high-powered rifle from a powerboat that had accompanied the canoe. The shooting was done in accordance with the International Whaling Commission's stipulation that the whale was not to suffer. Dragging eight whalers in a thirty-six-foot canoe attached by harpoons, they deemed, could make for a painful death. As Peterson and Hogan describe it, the whale's death was painful despite the commission's stipulation, following three rifle shots, "the wounded whale struggled, twisting and zigzagging, pulling the Makah hunters a short distance, three harpoons lodged in her 30-foot body" (Peterson 148).

After the killing, according to Peterson and Hogan, the whale was floated by scuba divers who tied inflatable floats to the sunken carcass because none of "the hunters had the equipment or the skill to dive into the water to sew up the mouth of the grey so the huge body would float, as their Makah ancestors would have done" (Peterson 148). Furthermore, the whale, once dead and afloat, was not rowed back to the village as tradition would have had it, but was towed back to Neah Bay under diesel rather than human power; only within sight of the shore did the canoe crew take over and then receive help from men in other canoes. Also troubling for Hogan and Peterson is the fact of the failure of the hunters and community to perform the proper ceremony after the killing. The whalers had evidently left the beach, "leaving few, if any, to complete the ancient ceremony of singing all night to the sacrificed whale" (Peterson 149–50). Hogan is especially concerned about what she sees as a failure of connection between

the hunters and the hunted: "*[I]n the old days*," she writes, "*the relationship between the people and the whales was the significant factor to every whale hunt*" (Peterson 153; Hogan's emphasis). That quality of relationship, according to Hogan, was missing from the 1999 hunt. And of course, the entire proceeding was made into a spectacle, filmed and watched over by numerous interested parties: news crews from ships and helicopters, police, Greenpeace members. The hunters themselves made a compilation video of the hunt. Opponents like to point out that none of these activities are traditional in any strict sense.

In addition to their questions about how closely the hunters followed an established tradition, opponents have raised issues concerning whether or not the Makahs do indeed have what can be called a whaling tradition in the first place. The International Whaling Commission's definition of "aboriginal subsistence whaling" has heretofore demanded that a whaling community have such a "continuing" tradition. The operative word here is "continuing." This is not the case with the Makahs. Insofar as the hunters had to reinstate the ceremonial practices surrounding the hunt, there clearly has not been a continuing tradition of whaling among them. Until 1999, it must be remembered, no living Makah had ever successfully whaled.

Opponents of whaling, including many Makahs themselves, disregard the argument McCarty presents—that whale hunting offers a way to keep his culture from being swallowed up. These opponents argue that whale hunting is no longer a necessity for literal physical survival or for survival of tribal identity. In this sense then, many argue, they no longer practice aboriginal subsistence hunting. Even though the whale meat was indeed distributed to community members, whale hunting cannot be considered actually necessary for physical survival, claim the hunt's opponents; the hunt created no long-term jobs, and fed no Makahs long term. But the issue of survival is not so easily tossed off. The Makahs "initially asserted the point of the hunt was not to earn money or to procure food, but to 'improve their self esteem' and 'tribal unity'" (Green), and according to the NOAA Fisheries revised opinion at the 1997 International Whaling Commission meeting in Monaco, the issue of self-esteem is permissible; that is, the committee found that "subsistence hunting includes far more than physical survival. It is a way of life that includes historical practices

and is the cultural 'glue' that holds the Tribe together" (Blow). The cultural-glue argument implies an issue of authority and sovereignty as well as of authenticity. The tribal members should have the sovereign authority to determine for themselves what is authentically Makah. If Makahs do it, it is necessarily authentic. Opponents of whaling, however, argue that if it is an integral part of the culture then it must be continuous, must have been continuous; if the culture can survive a seventy-year hiatus from whale hunting, so the argument goes, hunting must not then be an integral part of the culture. The authentic Makah, by this reasoning, must be a part of a whaling culture, whether or not any given individual is actually a hunter or a member of a hunting family.

Many argue that the hunt has indeed helped the culture revive and thus survive. Tribal proponents of whaling in addition to McCarty argue "that the cultural needs and traditions of the Makah outweigh political and moral objections" (Walker). According to Lynda V. Mapes, a *Seattle Times* reporter, "since the successful hunt of May, 1999, there has been a 'sea change' on the part of the Makah tribe toward whaling" (Mapes). And tribal council member Marcy Parker was pleased with the commission's decision to allow the Makahs to resume whaling: "We appreciate the support and dedication the United States government has shown the Makah Tribe in our request to resume our centuries-old whaling heritage. The Makah tribal members will now be able to again perform important whaling rituals and receive sustenance from this important and traditional marine resource. Today will mark one of the most significant events in our history with Western civilization that will now be passed on through our oral traditions as a positive move toward cultural revival of vital missing links once thought lost to our people" (U.S. Delegation).

Hogan and Peterson offer a different reading of the posthunt sentiments and concerns of the tribal council. According to their understanding of the aftereffects of the hunt, "a new Makah Tribal Council, while continuing to assert its treaty right to go whaling, is now deeply concerned with a 50 percent unemployment rate and is arguing that the tribe's 'other needs are more pressing.' The focus now is on 'economic development and jobs. Public safety, drug enforcement, programs for youth, and even tourism all are on the council's agenda' " (qtd. in Peterson 160). Given these two very different interpretations of what the successful hunt has led to, it is clear

that the controversy over the hunt and its effects on the tribe's well-being continues to rage.

The controversy continues in the courts, in personal attacks, and in debates over what constitutes tradition. In the fall of 2005, members of the marine animals activist group Sea Shepherd again challenged the Makahs' efforts to renegotiate their right to whale, maintaining that the "hunt needs to be authorized as legal under the regulations of the IWC [International Whaling Commission]" (*Sea Shepherd*, "Report"). If not, they maintain, hunting is illegal. Suggestive of the group's strong bias is a *Sea Shepherd News* release that incorrectly refers to the hunt as an "illegal slaughter" (*Sea Shepherd*, "Cursed"). The whale was indeed killed, but the hunt was legal in every sense of the term, sanctioned by the 1855 Treaty, the federal government, and the International Whaling Commission. The Makahs have not been allowed to resume hunting, however, since 2002 when animal rights activists won a U.S. Circuit Court case that demanded the Makahs obtain a waiver from the 1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act. Thus although the International Whaling Commission has granted approval for the Makahs' "renewed subsistence hunting of gray whales," obtaining the waiver could take years (Associated Press). Even within the United States Congress there is contention over the issue of Makah whaling. While the negotiation hearings were going on in the fall of 2005, the House Resources Committee urged that the whaling rights guaranteed by the 1855 Treaty be upheld and that the waiver requirement be dropped. Those committee members voting against the measure argued that although they support the tribe's treaty rights they also want to uphold the Marine Mammal Protection Act (see Daly).

In addition to the legal battles, the controversy also continues to rage on a more personal and invidious level. In the summer of 2006, seven years after the hunt, one of the protesters, Paul Watson of the Sea Shepherds, seems to have taken spiteful pleasure in the death of sixty-eight-year-old Joseph Andrew (Jerry) Jack, a Mowchaht tribal chief who was thrown into the sea when the *Hummingbird*, the canoe used in the 1999 hunt, capsized off Dungeness Spit near Sequim, Washington. In the *Sea Shepherd News*, Watson is reported to have said that the " 'sea has now claimed a life for the one that the Makah whalers took. The Buddhists would call this karma; the whales would call this justice' " (*Sea Shepherd*, "Cursed"). By any mea-

sure, the suggestion that in Jerry Jack's death justice was served is hard to comprehend. Jack was active in land claims and resource issues; in 2004 he led a protest to keep an orca whale in Nootka Sound (see Chung); and as a member of a traditional whaling culture himself, he supported the Makahs' tribal right to hunt. He was not, however, directly involved in the Makah hunt itself. As reported in *Indian Country Today*, Jack's son commented that his father " 'loved anything to do with our culture, language, and traditions, and for him the canoe was central to all that' " (Wiwchar). An Associated Press source reports that Jack was participating in the annual Intertribal Canoe Journey, whose 2006 theme was "Past and Present Pulling Together for Our Future" (*Seattle Times*). The report in the *Sea Shepherd News* clearly indicates the bitterness and animosity still harbored by some of the opponents to the hunt. The headline itself, "Cursed Makah Whaling Canoe Retired," underscores the report's biased focus, calling attention to the canoe not the man who drowned.

The controversy over what constitutes tradition continues as well. The *Sea Shepherd* article points out, for instance, that after the accident the canoe was not burnt even though tradition would have it so (*Sea Shepherd*, "Cursed"). And throughout the 2005 hearings concerning renewal of the right to hunt, animal rights advocates repeated their assertions that to grant the Makahs the right to hunt would again set a dangerous precedent. Hunting advocates among the Makahs repeatedly referred to treaty rights and to cultural tradition to make their case. Dave Stones, Makah Tribal Council Vice Chairman, is reported to have said that "the Makahs hunted whales long before U.S. and international whaling communities established guidelines protecting the animals." He also noted that "it wasn't Native Americans who hunted the whales to near-extinction" (Wetzel).

Whether it is questions about tradition surrounding the canoe in 2006 or about the actual hunt in 1999, the controversy continues. In the months leading up to the 1999 hunt, some opponents of whaling within the Makah tribe itself argued that whaling is not and need not be a fundamental part of one's Makah identity or a part of culture survival, especially since until 1999, no living Makah had ever whaled. Alberta Thompson, for example, paraphrases a Quilliute Tribal member who argues against whaling as a means of establishing tribal identity: one does not have to "kill a whale to keep [the] tradition[s]. We know our traditions, we know what we've done

in the past, we know what we're doing now, and we can pass all of this on to our children." At the same time that she opposes killing a whale as a means of authenticating oneself, however, Thompson acknowledges that dissension within the tribe is a serious problem: when the tribe "get[s] split in half we're weak. We have a hard time judging what's right and wrong" (Thompson). In her essay for the *Seattle Times*, Lynda Mapes adds to her account of the controversy by quoting a Makah elder, Lawrence Moss, who argues that the "family doesn't need whaling to tell them they are Makah. I don't need a whale killed to be any more Makah than I have been my entire life" (qtd. in Mapes). In a very real sense the issue is irresolvable. One Makah elder insists that one's Makah identity depends on a living tradition of whaling; another insists that Makah identity is perfectly intact without whaling as a part of the contemporary culture.

Given the internal tribal politics surrounding the Makah whale hunt controversy, we see that it is next to impossible to essentialize a Makah as a whaler. In one sense, tribal identity is not so easily authenticated; in another sense, however, any act is authentically Makah if performed by a Makah. Jana Sequoya argues that as "an effect of the discourse of authenticity encoded in the thesis–revival (of essential Indianness), the antithesis–invention (of a spurious identity), denies to those of native American descent the conditions of modern identity-formation celebrated as freedom by the general citizenry throughout the history of the United States." Sequoya acknowledges the importance of "authenticity" at the same time as she points out the very problematical issues involved: "Although the future of the authentic Indian is a figment of the popular imagination, it nevertheless has real consequences for contemporary American Indian people" (Sequoya 282, 284). Extending Sequoya's argument to the issue of whaling, we can get a sense of the consequences. According to some, the would-be whaler must prove that whaling is authentically Makah *before* he has the right to hunt. This argument is based on the fiction that there is such a person as an authentic (or an inauthentic) Makah. It is clear that the question "Where does the essential Native American stand on the issue of whaling?" is patently absurd. Members of the Makah tribe themselves are torn over the issue. Tribal proponents of whaling argue "that the cultural needs and traditions of the Makah outweigh political and moral objections" (Walker). And furthermore, they argue, treaty rights recognize

the tradition and guarantee the right of the Makahs to whale. Opponents, in contrast, argue that there are indeed significant and worthwhile moral objections that trump this one particular aspect of Makah tradition. They find this particular tradition questionable anyway, and they maintain that the moral objections outweigh even the treaty right. Unquestionably, the successful, partially traditional hunt, on some levels, did indeed reenact a tradition that had been long dormant. Many Makah tribal members assert that the tradition is fundamental to their sense of who they are as members of a community, a community of people who have historically whaled and fished. And that issue of identity played a part in their gaining the right to hunt in the first place. In fact their being able to see themselves as whalers transcends tribe. On the day of the killing, Billy Frank Jr. (Nisqually) asserted, "Today is the day we are all Makah" (Preston 3).

These are issues on the communal and legal levels, but does the issue of tribal identity or authenticity have any significance on a global level? And what about issues of tribal sovereignty? How do facts of nationhood and of global politics affect the issue of a legal and moral right to hunt whales? One opponent argues that by "permitting the Makah to kill gray whales, the government has transformed the United States into a whaling nation" (Shukovsky). Accurate on the one hand, on the other hand this attitude denies the Makah Nation its sovereignty. Although the treaty reads that the Makahs "acknowledge their dependence on the Government of the United States," the establishment of the reservation in the same treaty signals that the tribe does have sovereignty ("Treaty of Neah Bay"). As a sovereign nation, the Makah tribe in a sense should be awarded the same status as Japan, Russia, Norway, or any other whaling nation. Yet at the same time, American Indian nations do not tend to enjoy international recognition as nations. On international fronts Native nations have a history of exclusion. In the U.N. for example, there are no Native nations as members. The U.N. did establish a "Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues," however, and that forum was intended to serve as an advisory body to the council itself, especially "relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights" (Sikora). Given a certain specific interpretation of the right guaranteed by treaty, regardless of interpretations of sovereignty, the Makahs have gained the legal right to hunt whales. They have tradition and the treaty interpretation on their

side. But in the twenty-first century, whaling is fraught with serious ethical questions that go beyond the literal legal rights of an individual tribe or nation, regardless of sovereignty. The proponents of Makah whaling ask the rest of the world to decolonize their attitudes toward the hunt; to allow the tribe to understand itself once again as it was in the past, a nation of fishers and whalers. Fair enough. Now may environmentalists or animal rights advocates in turn ask the Makahs as whale hunters to decolonize their attitudes toward nonhuman nature? Is it fair that they be asked to reassess their relationship with a nonhuman life such as the gray whale's?

Near the end of the novel *Power* Linda Hogan offers a justification for the killing of the panther: "In the old days when we were beautiful and agile, we asked the animals to lay down their lives for us and in turn we offered them our kinship, our respect, our words in the next world over from here, our kind treatment" (*Power* 229). One has to ask whether Hogan's suggested resolution, romantic as it sounds, is workable, especially in the context of the whale. If the life of the individual animal does not matter, one could ask, does the species matter? If the individual gray whale or the individual Florida panther is treated as expendable, then how does one argue for the species? Besides maintaining this internal, irresolvable paradox, Hogan's resolution calls for a return to an older world, a return to some presumed pristine past, to "the old days" that may well have never existed. In his essay "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality," Aijaz Ahmad addresses this very issue. He cautions against the impetus to deny history by retreating into "a mythic past [that] is posited as the only true moment of cultural authenticity, hence the only measure of time, so that the vocation of history is to turn upon itself and recoup that mythic measure and rehabilitate that lost but ever-present authenticity, always in pursuit of a past that never was" (Ahmad 291). Is Hogan advocating such a pursuit? Is the Makah hunt an example of history turning upon itself in an effort to recoup a past that never was?

In a sense, such questions bring us full circle. As we have seen, Hogan and other American Indian writers resist the appeal of defining oneself by the past, resist the stereotyping that such turns invite. And at the same time, they face issues and advocate stances that necessitate some sort of essentializing in order to establish a point of difference between what they see as a viable option to environmental issues and the dead-end directions

they witness European Americans taking. When in *Power* the white sheriff asks Omishto why Ama would kill the panther, Omishto realizes that she knows the reason but cannot articulate it. All she can say is this: " 'You have to think of god,' she tells him; 'you have to think history.' " And the sheriff looks at her "as if [she] had spoken another language" (*Power* 206). And in a sense she has. What Hogan denies (or her character overlooks) is that to think history means to think change. Customs, traditions, beliefs all evolve. They evolved in tribal America before European contact, they evolved after contact, and they continue to evolve. One cannot deny the inevitability of cultural change, and the attempt itself is dangerous. It is dangerous because of the problem of stasis, denial of change through history. Such denial is paramount in mainstream culture's stereotyping American Indians as nineteenth-century worshipers of a Mother Earth goddess. Clearly it is not enough to argue that contemporary Makahs should hunt whales simply because their ancestors hunted whales; nor is it enough to argue that because the hunt is different in a different century, it is not traditional.

On one level, the issue may have resolved itself. In almost a decade since that one successful hunt, the Makahs have not killed another gray whale. But they nevertheless continue their efforts to win back the legal sanction to resume whaling. In May 2007 the International Whaling Commission again granted them the right to hunt four whales a year for five years. Despite this favorable ruling, they still must obtain a waiver from the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act. According to tribal council member Micah McCarty, without the waiver, the commission's approval is "largely a symbolic victory" (Associated Press). But it is a victory, nonetheless, and it demonstrates that this issue or similar issues concerning whaling and fishing, concerning the Makah Nation or other nations, are sure to arise. According to Hogan and Peterson, perhaps one can hope that in the future one particular nation will put the argument like this: We realize that in the past seventy-odd years times have changed; we realize that our tribe has changed, that the tribe's understanding of itself has changed. Yes, we have the right to hunt the gray whale; and, yes, the United States and the international community have the responsibility to acknowledge that right. We have the right, but we choose not to act on it. This is just the suggestion Hogan offers in *Sightings*:

> *If the Makah choose not to continue whaling, it could truly make a statement about how strong a culture can be, as it looks to other means for the true and deep wellspring of a culture, of a people, one that holds to a reverence for life.*
>
> *They will set an example for others by which part of the culture they decide to cultivate. And for the children at Makah, what better example than seeing their own people take the side of life, as part of the sacred. That might very well restore tradition until the whale and the people reestablish a relationship of offering and receiving from one another. The way it used to be. The heart of the hunter has to care.* (Peterson 154; Hogan's emphasis)

As the rift among members of the Makah community and as Hogan's argument for the cessation of whaling make clear, different individual American Indians have different views about an individual Indian's or an entire tribe's roles or relationships, interactions, with nature. What this literature demonstrates over and over again is that Native American relationships with the land are complex and intricate, and that they cannot be reduced to stereotypes or seen to offer easy solutions. These writers are able in a sense to articulate and live with what seems almost a paradox at the center of that relationship. Standing Bear and Mathews, for example, challenge the very culture they participate in. Erdrich survives by acknowledging her being part of a natural world that asks her to be willing perhaps to sacrifice herself. Owens's character Tom confronts the paradox inherent in the fact that his attempts to protect the land force him to abandon it, at least literally and temporarily. Momaday, Deloria, and Vizenor rely on the power of story to create their reality and their land ethic, but that reality is one in which the dominant culture despoils the land. In the novel *Power*, Omishto ponders a question at the heart of such apparent paradoxes: "How can there be two truths that contradict each other?" (*Power* 115). How can truths contradict each other and still be truths? How can animal rights and treaty rights both have legitimacy? How can American Indian writers advocate a land ethic, a respect for the natural world, and at the same time confound attempts to stereotype them? These writers suggest, certainly, that a whaling (or a hunting or fishing or mining) community can enjoy respectful and environmentally sound relationships with the natural world, relationships that still allow for whaling, fishing, and hunting, relationships in which there is room for many different truths.

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